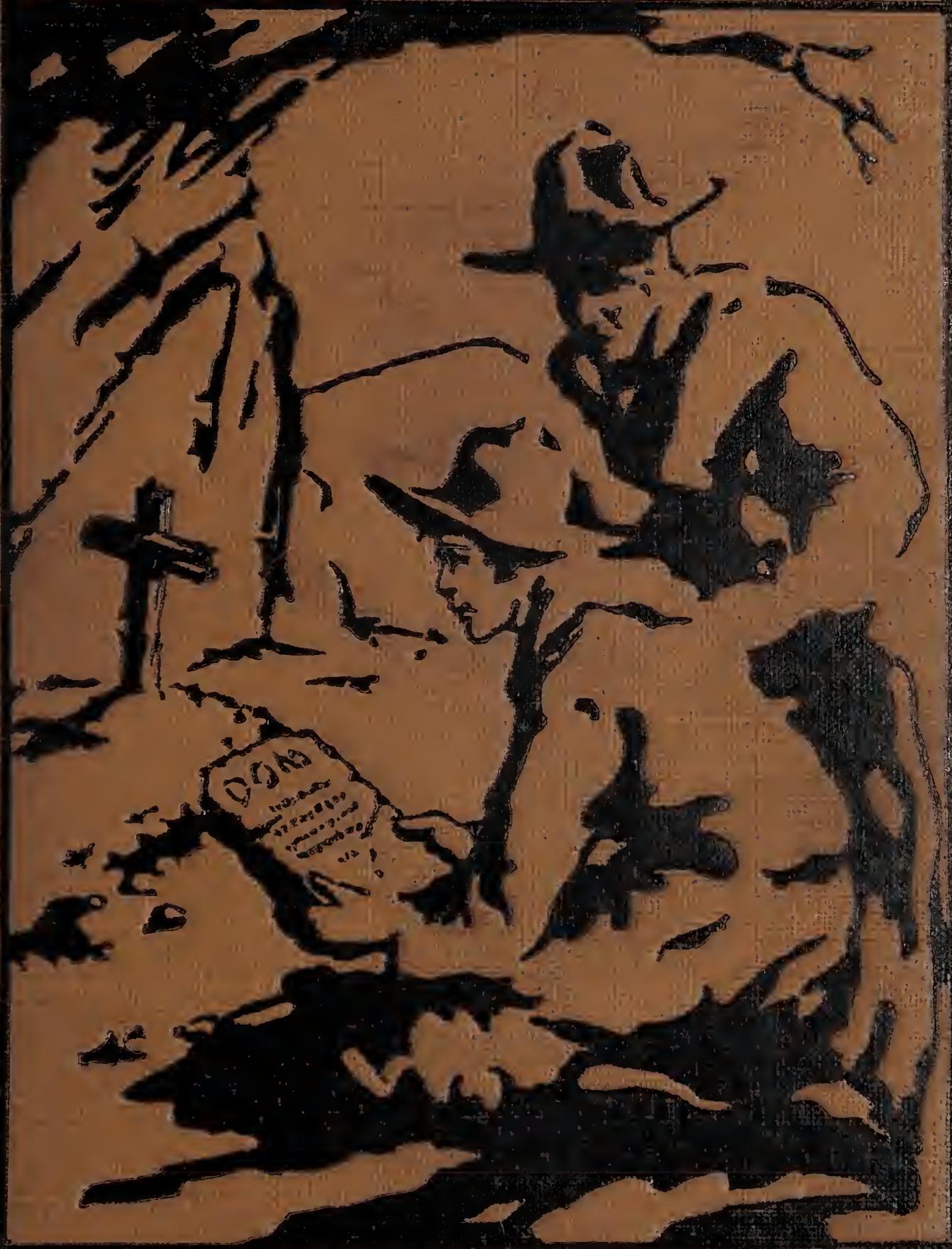


RED MESA



WARREN H. MILLER

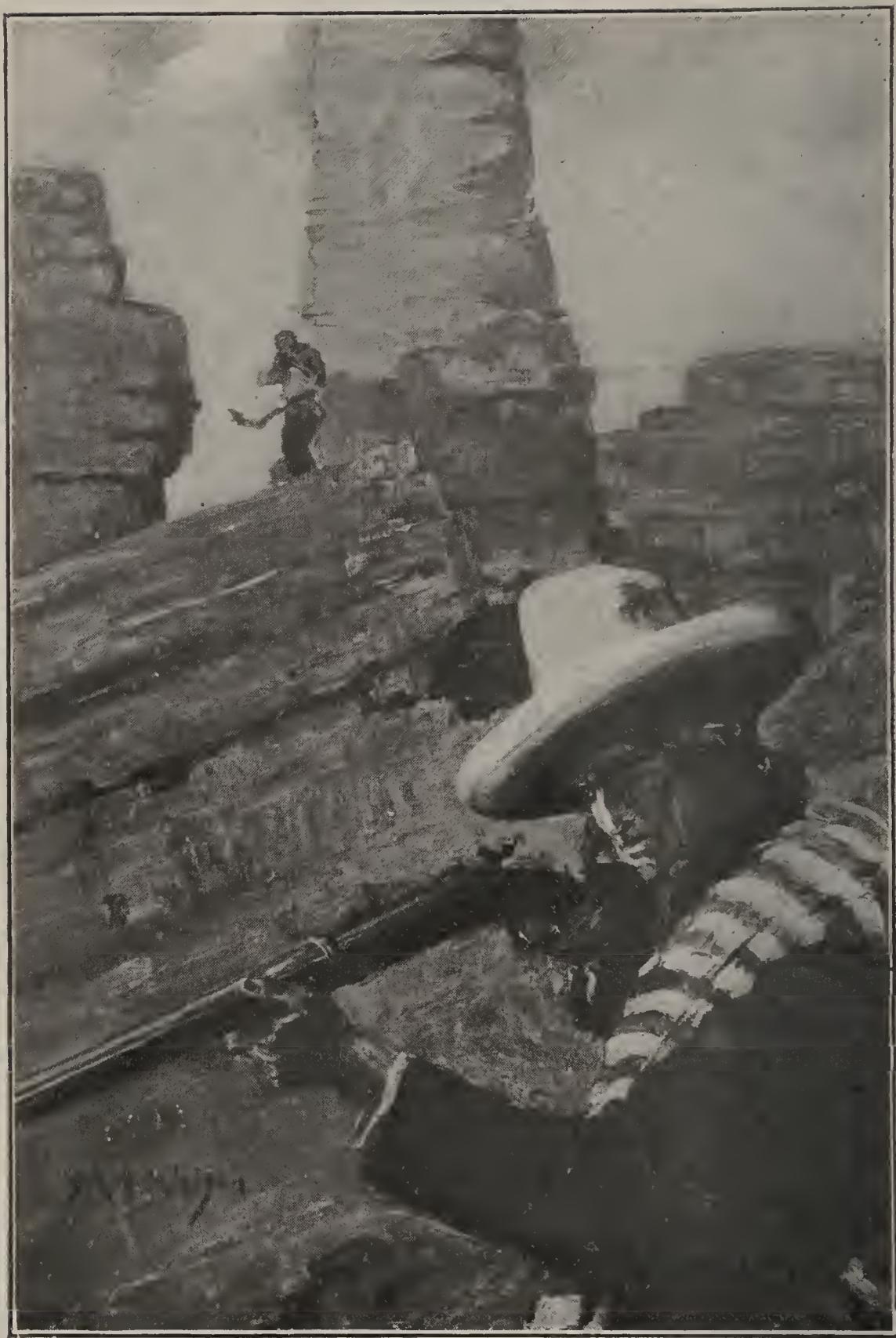


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RED MESA



NILTCI GOT ONE GLIMPSE OF VASQUEZ, STANDING WITH HIS
RIFLE POISED.

RED MESA

A TALE OF THE SOUTHWEST

BY

WARREN H. MILLER

AUTHOR OF

"THE BLACK PANTHER OF THE NAVAHO,"
"THE RING-NECKED GRIZZLY," ETC.



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CHAPTER I

CAÑON HONANKI

ABOVE a timbered valley in the southwest rises a towering wall of gorgeous cliffs such as only Arizona can produce. Their rock pinnacles are banded with color—red strata, ochre, blue, green, and white—all in wavy horizontal lines like layer cake. These long walls were scoured clean and smooth long ago by prehistoric water action. They were broken with deep fissures—fissures that now cleave the cliff from top to bottom—"chimneys" that mean seven hundred feet of sheer ascent to him who would dare scale these heights.

Two riders sat gazing up, searching this cliff face, while an Airedale dog of huge and leonine aspect prowled about in the creek bottom near them, investigating this and that with snuffing nose.

"That cliff dwelling is up here somewhere, accord-

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ing to Doctor Fewkes' map, John," said the smaller and rangier of the pair, his puckered-up black eyes never leaving off their scrutiny of the cliff face. "Think we'll find her?"

The older man, a great, bony and leathery cowman, who might have hailed from anywhere in the west from Montana to Arizona, took off his sombrero and mopped a sweaty brow with the loose end of his bandanna.

"Search me!" he grinned. "I'm a cowman, not no prophet—as the greenhorn axman said when the lumber boss as't him which way his tree was goin' to fall." He looked lugubriously up at the cliff, shaking his head solemnly. "It'd take a horned toad with suckers on his feet to bust her, Siddy son."

The youth tugged determinedly at the fine fuzz of black mustache that adorned his upper lip. "Honanki Ruins or bust—that's our motto, John!" he retorted, his black eyes twinkling merrily at the reluctant cowman. "Here's Fewkes' map, with the ruins marked 'Inaccessible' on it, and, by jerry, *we're* here, if the map's right. They're somewhere above us, and it's up to us to bust 'em."

"Yaas," said Big John, shifting his weight to the nigh stirrup to give the white horse under him a

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change of load. "Somethin' hed orter be done about it, thet's shore! *You* mosey up—an' I'll hold yore hoss!"

All of which preliminaries usually meant that Big John really meant to take the lead in climbing himself once the ruins were found. Sid knew that all this feigned reluctance about climbing cliffs was mere camouflage on Big John's part. He urged his pinto across the cañon so as to get a better view of the cliff face. He wanted to size up that cañon wall first, for he knew that the only way to keep Big John off that cliff was to tie him down, which "ain't done." The two had been boon comrades for a long time; first up in Montana on the hunt for the Ring-Necked Grizzly, later in the Cañon de Chelly region where the Black Panther of the Navaho had met his end. That expedition had been Sid's start in practical ethnology. Now they were down in the White River reservation of the Apache, seeking out ruins that had been noted by Dr. Fewkes of the Smithsonian but had been left unexplored for lack of time and facilities.

"There it is!" rang out the youth's voice excitedly from across Cañon Honanki (Bear Cañon). "Come over here, John!"

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The huge cowman trotted his white mustang over to where Sid had halted his pinto under a big western pine. Far up, at least three hundred feet above the floor of the valley, they saw holes like swallow's nests pierced in the cliff at irregular intervals. They seemed small and round and black as ink, and near them were carved on the rock odd circular spirals, lightning zigzags, primitive horses, apparently all legs, and geometrical armed-and-legged designs intended to represent men. Ragged holes further along on the cliff face showed that galleries and passageways ran in behind the living rock up there. These natural caves, common enough in Arizona, had been scoured out by water action in geologic times.

But it was a fearful place for human beings to attempt to climb to! Tall perpendicular folds in the cliff face cast their black shadows on the surrounding stone, the cracks beginning and ending nowhere. There were impracticable clefts, ledges that shaded off to flat precipice faces, dents and scoriations not over two feet deep, yet they seemed to be all the footholds for climbing that the place afforded.

"Gorry!—a cavate dwelling!" whooped Sid, overjoyed. "The kind that is built in the solid rock

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instead of being made of stone slabs, John," he explained with the ethnologist's enthusiasm.

Big John grinned. "Gawsh!" he exploded. "I s'pose that humans once tried to live in such places—but eagles would know better! Nawthin'll do but we gotta bust her, eh?"

"Yep," said Sid confidently. "A shaman or a pueblo priest lived up there once. Sort of hermit, you know. Holy man. If that old scout *lived* there we ought to be able to climb up *once*.—What think?"

"He didn't come pilgrimining down to shoot up the gulch *muy* plentiful, I'mbettin'!" averred Big John sardonically. "I'll tell ye, Sid; thar's only one way to bust her, and that's to make a string of long ladders, same as *he* done. You don't get me off this hoss on no fly-creepin' climb without a-doin' jest that—savvy?"

"Oh, thunder!" exclaimed Sid impatiently. "It'd take two days of perishing work. Le's try to get up this cleft here." He pointed to the beginnings of a practical ascent.

"No!" barked Big John, and his tone was final. "The Colonel, yore pappy, he'd stake me out an' build a fire on me tummy ef I let ye do any sech thing. Thet halter's still waitin' for you, Sid, I'll

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admit, to save having it proved on me, but I ain't aimin' to cheat your friends out of their necktie party none. We camps right here an' does the job proper, sabe, lil' hombre?"

Sid acquiesced, after a little further study of the cliff. There was a tall vertical cleft that led up to the swallow's nest holes by a series of breaks and rises. It was easy to reconstruct the old shaman's route by imagining the proper ladders set up so as to negotiate a number of these vertical rises. They could be made of slender lodgepole pine, with the branches left on for steps in place of the heavier logs with notched steps which the aborigines had used. And not over half a dozen of them would be needed altogether. It was worth doing, to "bust" an "Inaccessible."

Making camp in that rainless country was a simple matter. Sid simply selected a pleasant site on a knoll down the cañon overlooking the brook under a canopy of huge pines, while Big John unsaddled both horses and took them to the nearest grass plot, staking them out and leaving Blaze, his Airedale, on guard. The dog had been a present from Colonel Colvin after the Black Panther trip. He had the noted sagacity of his breed, and with a

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year's hunting experience with Ruler, the giant coonhound of that expedition, had become a most devoted and dependable "pardner" on all their hunts. After merely piling the sleeping and cooking gear and hanging up their food bags above the rodent zone, Sid was ready to go ladder cutting.

The White Mountain region is pine forest, sparsely timbered, the trees not crowded or packed so densely as in eastern forest growth. As a result, the mountains, which resemble much the rounded and rolling Alleghanies of the east, seem stippled with individual trees instead of banked in mossy green as with closely growing timber. In the river valleys, however, there are thickets as dense as in any well watered clime, so Sid lost no time in getting into such a pine grove armed with his light belt ax. That light, little long-handled ax of his was far more efficient than any sort of hatchet. It would drop a four-inch pole thirty feet high almost as quickly as a full ax.

Before the first tree crashed down Big John had joined him.

"This here *Pinus Contorta* (sounds like Julius Seizher only it ain't) is the boy that will bust her quick, Siddy boy," he laughed, rolling up his sleeves

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and baring a forearm like a lean ham. "You give a leetle feller like me elbowroom!" He took a full ax in one fist and smote a tree with it like chopping with a hatchet. About two judgmatical cuts sufficed to send it crashing down, whereat the giant cowman started after another. Sid saw that he would have his hands full just trimming the felled ones so he went for their boughs with his small ax.

"You cut off them tops whar' there's somethin' substantial to it, Sid," rang out Big John's voice from the timber as he sent another pine tumbling about the youth's ears. "Remember that I weigh a pound or two more'n a straw hat, son!"

"Help me put up this first one, now, John, she's ready," announced Sid, struggling to lift the trunk clear of the underbrush. Big John came over and heaved the whole tree unceremoniously up on his shoulder. With Sid guiding the lean end they made for the cliff. Pushing and panting they up-ended it and stood it ladderwise in a vertical fissure which gave on a ledge above. Sid swarmed up the short branch stubs, climbed out on the ledge, and waved his arms down to Big John below.

"Looks like one of us'd have to shinny up and haul the next one with a lariat," he called down.

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"Son, I got an idee—ef she don't get away while I'm picketin' her down," said Big John. "You git up thar and hang my lariat honda over that point of rock, sabe, an' then we'll run yore lariat through the honda and snake up the next pole by one of the hosses."

He got both lariats up from camp while Sid waited. Presently he returned, to cast it up with the sure whirling pitch of the born rope artist. Sid snatched it in and hauled his own up by the end of the other. Then he coiled both, attached them to his belt and started up the next cleft. The very pockets in the rock where feet of the ancient log ladders used to rest were easy to pick out as he climbed. What men had done a man could do! By the time he had everything fixed and the honda, or brass eye of the lariat, hung with the other rove through it, Big John was below with a horse and a fresh pole. It came snaking up as the cowman led the horse away, hauling on the lower end by the lariat tied to a cinch strap above the pony's back.

Sid set the pole and climbed higher to the next ledge so that they could repeat the maneuver with a third pole. This was the limit for that horse-hoisting stunt, however, for he was now up over eighty

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feet and there was not rope enough in camp to double through the next honda. Big John yelled up as he tied on the fourth pole and then he led the horse back to graze again.

In a few minutes Sid saw him climbing up below him. He had no fear of height himself. That all belongs to the tenderfoot aloft for the first time. It attacks man in a sickening sort of stage fright at first, whether on cliff, high building, or the upper rigging of a ship. After a time familiarity wears it off and in its place there comes a cheerfulness over the immense outlook, the height and the distant scenery of it all; a joyous sense of freedom that must be part of the bird's outlook on life. He waited for Big John on the ledge, looking about him interestedly. It was narrow but not dangerous up here. An old woman might have wanted a rail fence or something, he thought, but things were done on such a huge scale on this cliff that this very ledge that looked from below like a mere trace proved up here to be nearly three feet wide. Plenty! —Thousands! as the facetious Big John would have said.

Presently that cheerful son of Montana arrived, breathing heavily but entirely at ease. "Waal, son,

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it ain't goin' to freeze up an' snow on our scheme
jest yit! Tail on to this yere lariat and we'll yank
up another pole."

They hauled away on the long rope which the
cowman had tied to the butt of the fourth pole
while down there. It weighed perhaps fifty pounds
—nothing at all to mountain men! After a period
of grunting effort the butt end came up over the
ledge and the pole was gathered in and laid length-
wise. They then started on to prospect for the next
fissure.

"Gosh durn it, how come, son? Hyar be stone
steps leadin' up back hyar, or you can steal my hoss!"
came back Big John's voice in the lead as they
rounded the face of the huge pinnacle of rock. Sid
hurried to catch up. That simplified matters a whole
lot!

"Look yonder, John!" he cried excitedly, as they
climbed up the row of stone pockets, "one more
pole finishes us! See that hole in the wall across
the crevasse?"

"Sho' I do! But Sid, you ought to show some
respect for the naked truth, son—which-same
means we're *busted!* Yore hole's across a no-bot-

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tomed chasm, hombre, an' we ain't flies nor yit eagles, nohow!"

Sid climbed more notched steps that led up over a smooth billow of rock and then eyed the hole opposite, measuring the distance carefully. Here, evidently, began those scoured-out caves and tunnels in the living rock which led up to the cavate dwelling. There had been a log bridge across here once, but it had long since rotted through and perished.

"Let's drop our fourth pole across and then, we've got her, John—that's the answer!" declared Sid.

Big John shook his head solemnly. "Ef she breaks an' lets this gent down, they ain't goin' to be no come-back, that's sartain! No sir, nawthin' stirring!"

"Oh, shucks—where's that pole, John? Le's get her up here and let her fall over anyhow!" exclaimed Sid hopefully. "Maybe we can hit the hole opposite with its other end."

"I'll try that much," agreed Big John. "I ain't purty but I'm shore strong—as the bohunk said when they as't him to tote a saw log." And without more ado he retraced his steps and picked up the

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pole. With it on his shoulder he came teetering along the ledge.

“Thar, Sid—miss an’ out! We got jest one shot,” he grunted, standing the pole up and aiming its fall carefully.

“Wait!” shouted Sid. “Tie the lariat to the middle of it! You’ll feel better if you’ve got that to keep her from breaking,” he suggested.

“Center shot, son; plumb center! Shore you got almost human intelligence!” grinned Big John, lowering the pole again. Sid seemed to have an even better idea than that, now. He coiled the lariat and cast it up, to fall around a rock pinnacle above them. Then he tied its other end near the center of the pole and they let it fall slowly, paying out rope while Big John guided it by main strength until its other end rested square in the jagged black pit of the cave across the chasm from where they were standing.

“Ain’t afraid of nawthin’, now, with that good old rawhide lariat holdin’ her up,” declared Big John, beginning to climb across. Sid followed him, once the heavy bulk of the cowman had left the pole on the other side. Below him dropped away an endless shadowy chasm, with the tiny pines and firs of the

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valley visible hot in the sunlight far below. On both sides towered above him the huge smooth walls of the chimney made by the pinnacle and its neighbors. Sid cast a mere glance at the prospect below, and then climbed over swiftly and joined Big John in the black depths of the tunnel.

It was some time before their eyes became accustomed to the dim light. Up and up inside the living rock the narrow fissure climbed. Old steps, cut in the rock or built of flat stone slabs, guided them. Here and there light was let in by those irregular ragged holes in the cliff wall which they had seen from below.

"No one but a shaman would live here," declared Sid, speaking ethnologically; "a basket of corn, some dried meat and a string of peppers would last him a whole season. But there's water up here somewhere."

"Hed orter be!" said Big John laconically. "This place's as dry as the professor's book, whar the dust flewed out of the pages when you opened it. Besides, that Indian'd grow a beard a mile long while he's jest gittin' down out'n hyar fer a drink!"

There *was* water up there. After a long climb, when their aching knees positively refused to lift for

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another step, they came to a little basin hollowed out of the rock by human hands. A thin trace of water came weeping down from somewhere in the interior here, to lose itself and evaporate on the outside cliff face. A spruce growing out of the crevice, which they could see through the next window, showed that all that water was being preëmpted by just that one tree. A spruce seed had found it somehow. Nature leaves nothing unutilized.

A blaze of light now lit up the chasm ahead. The gallery in the rock became more open and led upward to a wide door cut out of the rock. Here the shaman of long ago had looked out on the frailties and follies of the world below him, serene, indifferent, meditating on the destinies of his people. Those times surely needed one wise man to sit apart and do the thinking for them all, for in this pueblo country the hostile and warlike Apaches had been fearsome invaders even before the time of the Spaniards. How long before that they and the Navaho had come down from the far north no man knows. But they found the peaceful and sedentary pueblo Indians an easy prey, and gradually they drove them all out of these cliff dwellings in the mountains to build themselves defensive villages on

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the high mesas of the Painted Desert to the north.

Sid and Big John stopped at that natural doorway to look out below. Cañon Honanki lay a green-spired paradise below them. Bare, barren cliffs, streaked with color, rose opposite. A short way down the valley the horses could be picked out grazing placidly. The watchful Blaze lay near them and he rose and barked at sight of his master, his faint volleys echoing up the cliffs.

“Now for Mr. Inaccessible—the cavate dwelling!” exclaimed Sid triumphantly. He led on upward until he came to a low door built in a stone wall laid up without mortar. Entering it, they saw that a round window cut through the cliff stone lit up the small cave room. Baskets, finely woven, of a texture and quality seldom seen nowadays, greeted Sid’s delighted eyes. There were shallow marriage and ceremonial baskets; bottle-shaped ones waterproofed with piñon gum, the kind now called *tus* and used in medicine dances; large granary baskets still filled with dry kernels of blue, black, red, and white corn. A few black pottery jars, decorated with white lightning zigzags, stood in the corners. Strings of corn ears, red peppers, and dried onions, all musty

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and shriveled, hung from poles let into the roof of the cave.

“The old bird was a rain-maker, all right,” said Big John, pointing irreverently at the zigzags on the jars and baskets. “Claimed he invented the lightning, all-same as Benjamin Franklin.”

But Sid did not answer. Instead his eyes were riveted in sheer astonishment on the smooth rock wall of the cave, and he grabbed Big John’s sleeve and pointed, speechless with wonder.

“Gorry!—Look there, John!” he finally found breath to exclaim. “Here is the *last* place a fellow would expect to see the writing of a white man, I’ll say!”

“Well, I’ll be durned!” growled Big John, peering at the letters with Sid.

Written on the wall, in red earth letters and still as bright as the day they were made, was—a name! a Spanish name!

FRA PEDRO DEL VACAS, 1680.

“Can you beat it!” cried Sid, breathlessly. “Gorry, what a find!—Le’s see, John,” he went on excitedly, “1680 was the year of the big massacre, wasn’t it?”

“Search me!” said Big John whimsically. “All

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I know about them greasers is that you shore don't have to oil yore bullets none to slip 'em through their feathers."

"Sure it was 1680!" continued Sid, ignoring Big John's observation upon our Mexican neighbors. "That year all the tribes rose against their Spanish friars. Most of them were murdered or martyred—especially those that the Apaches got hold of. This Fra came up here to the old shaman for refuge. *Why* did he write that inscription then? Because he was dying, of course! Escaped from the Apaches somehow, wounded perhaps, and was carried up here by the pueblo people. The Spanish missionaries did not carve their initials on every rock. He left his name for the next missionary to find, if ever one should visit this pueblo again. It means something, John. We'll look for pueblo graves, next, and maybe get some more light on it."

Sid's idea of searching for graves might seem astounding to any one but an ethnologist. But the richest prehistoric relics are always obtained from exhumed graves, usually located near some shaman's cave. The body was always mummied, and with it were buried most of the pueblo Indian's possessions. Here the early cotton blankets, yucca sandals, bas-

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kets, pottery, and weapons are found in a tolerable state of preservation, and they all show that the prehistoric pueblo dwellers lived very much as their descendants do to-day.

Big John was used to Sid's intense enthusiasms in ethnological matters and was accustomed to following him around—to see that he "didn't break his fool neck an' so cheat that rope that's waitin' fer him" as he always put it. He bent his tall frame in pursuit as Sid dodged out of the house and darted for a deep and dusty grotto that lay behind it. A huge horizontal fissure, not over four feet high, had been worn out here by the waters, undermining the cliffs above for a considerable distance. A stratum of mud, long since dried to dust, covered the floor of the fissure. Closely dotted over it were slabs of stone, under each of which one would find a small stone kiva or dry well. The mummy would be discovered sitting upright in it, swathed about with cotton blanketing made long before the first wool from the first sheep that gave it was stolen from the Spaniards by the Navaho. Generally also the mummy was covered with ceremonial basketry. But Sid passed them all by, for the present. What he was searching for now was a white man's grave.

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And, far back under the rock he found it, a long mound with a rude cross set in the dust at its head. A single flat stone lay across the center of the mound.

Raising it, the persistent Indian burial customs proved to have been still adhered to. A long black robe, with a ghastly skull peeping from the cowl, lay flat on the bottom of the niche, which was a sort of stone coffin, its sides lined with stone slabs built in shallow walls precisely like the Indian rivas. The top was roofed over with stone, on which the earth had been mounded up as the white priest had evidently directed it should be. There was nothing else in the grave. Nothing, that is, but a *flat slab of pottery*, lying across the dead friar's chest!

Its square shape at once attracted Sid as unusual and not Indian. He picked it up with queer thrills running all through him. A message from that white man of long ago! For there was writing graven on the clay, and the three letters "D. O. M." stood at the head of the plaque.

"A Dominican friar, he was, John," said Sid, reverently. He began to read aloud the sonorous Latin written on the plaque, conjuring up his forgotten Cæsar of high-school days.

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"What's that stuff, huh?" inquired Big John. "Sounds like spig talk, but 'tain't. I'm a hundred per cent American, Sid, I am, an' I don't like it," he growled, shaking his head sturdily.

"Can't make it out myself," confessed Sid, after reading it a little farther. He found that he had forgotten his Latin so much that merely to pronounce the words was an effort. "Here's a few that I *do* know, though, John: '*Aurum et Argentum*,' that's gold and silver; '*Pinacate*,' '*Sonoyta*,' those are places; '*Papagoii*, the Papagoes; '*Mesa Rubra*' that's Red Mesa——"

"Never heard tell of it," declared Big John, promptly. "Thar's a red mesa up Zuñi way, but there's no gold or silver thar; an' Pinacate is a long thirsty ride down over the lava country into Mexico. Ain't no mesas in that country nohow. She's all red lava saw teeth an' spiny choyas—if you asks me."

"It's an old Spanish *mine*—that's what the plaque's all about!" shouted Sid, excitedly. "Some of the Papagoes must have told this old fra about a gold and silver mine, located in Red Mesa down Pinacate way—say, Scotty will have to hear of this.

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John!" whooped Sid, carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment.

Big John shook his head solemnly: "Son, folks has died of thirst *in thousands*, chasing lost Spanish mines in that country! Santa Fé's full of old priest reports like this yer. The Indians shore did stuff 'em with gauzy tales! Thar's mineral down thar, I'll 'low; but after ye find it, what ye got? Reminds me of the recipe for cookin' a fish-duck. Ye take an' soaks him in three kinds of soup; bile him four days; stuff him with an apple an' a onion; tie a bunch of celery 'round his neck, wrap him in a couple of slabs of bacon; stick in a hunk of garlic; add salt, pepper, and a bottle of wine; bake him three hours—an' presto, the gosh-darn fish-duck is gone! That's how a feller feels when he finds a mine in that country, Sid; ye cayn't git the miner'l out nohow!"

Sid's laughter pealed out. "Well, we'll hunt up old Scotty just the same and then go get some one to translate this Latin. Scotty'll just go crazy over this tablet, and he needs the money, John. We can come back here for the Indian relics some other time. Scotty and Niltci are prospecting down in the Santa Catalinas for mineral, right now, you know——"

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“An’ they won’t find nawthin’ down thar thet ain’t been found long ago, jest as I told him,” interjected Big John.

“Sure! We’ll ride down there and give him this tablet. It will be a life-saver for old Scotty! Red Mesa or bust! John—how’s that for a new motto?”

“Looks handsome, but she ain’t edible,” said Big John, enigmatically.

But Sid just couldn’t get over his enthusiasm for his chum Scotty’s sake about this Latin tablet. What a find for good old Les! That mine would be his big chance! Friendship was sweet; to be able to do something for a chum was keen pleasure. He sat down and went on studying over the tablet, balking at strange Latin words, digging up more of them out of his memories of his school Cæsar. The old pottery plaque fascinated him. He kept speculating about it, how it came to be made, where the old fra had got his information about the mine. What an ancient old story this was!

“This fra used to live with the cavate dweilers here, John, I tell you! He made this plaque and had them fire it when they baked their own pottery. Imperishable record, you see. It’s a real find, I tell you! One of those lost Spanish mines that really *is*

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so! '*In regione Papagoii*' that's the Papago country of Pinacate, all right. '*XXI milia S-O ab Pinacate*' plain as shootin', twenty-one miles north-east from Pinacate,' '*Mesa Rubra*'—there's a hill that looks like a red mesa down there—that's the dope! Gee! What a start for good old Scotty! Le's go! We'll ride straight for his camp in the Catalinas!"

Big John grinned saturnine grins as he deposited the pottery plaque in the small rucksack without which he never left his horse. Then he got up and followed the eager Sid down the long, dark ascent of steps up which they had come.

CHAPTER II

THE LURE OF THE MINE

“**I**T’S panning out mighty low-grade stuff!—Dog-gone it!”

The young man who made this ejaculation, and in a most discouraged tone, too, was slender and wiry, with sandy reddish hair surmounting a Scotch cast of features. His face was freckled and sunburned. The inextinguishable hope of youth still flickered in his blue eyes, but there was worry, anxiety, there, too—the sign of that nagging, cankering care that keeps a fellow thin.

He shook his head as he held up a test tube in its wooden holder to the sunlight.

“Won’t do!” he muttered. “Anybody can find a mine in Arizona—but few can find a paying one.”

He looked about him at the silent and colorful mountains surrounding him, hopeless misery in his eyes. They had no answer for him! The brush sunshade that he and the Indian boy who was his companion had established was Scotty Henderson’s

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base camp for mine prospecting. Our readers may have met him before—on the trip for the Ring-necked Grizzly in Montana or when after the Black Panther of the Painted Desert country of Arizona.

Leslie Henderson—Scotty's real name—had a heavy load to carry, for a youth of nineteen. It weighed nothing physically but mentally it was a burden far beyond his years. And the letter from his mother that he was now carrying in a hip pocket of his riding breeches had added a sickening load upon a mind already worn with anxiety. It had told him, as gently and self-sacrificingly as possible, of his mother's decision to sell the old Henderson place back east. The cost of living had gradually come to exceed Major Henderson's pension, which was all the Great War had left them of his father, the good old Doctor. To a woman used to comforts and a roof over her head as a matter of course, to say nothing of the ancestral associations of that homestead, that decision of Scotty's mother was a far heavier blow to her than her words would admit. Delicately put, it meant in plain words that Scotty would either have to strike a paying mine claim *soon* or else give up his heritage of independence, that heritage that every real man claims as his

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birthright, and take a position somewhere in some great mining corporation. And the outlook was pretty black, now.

"No go, Niltci!" groaned Scotty, emptying the green fluid in the test tube with a gesture of discouragement, "we'll have to break camp and move on."

With that decision the hopelessness of all this endless prospecting surged over Scotty in an overwhelming wave. Arizona had been combed all over for mines! There was plenty of this sort of thing, this scanty and scattered deposit of copper carbonate, poor in per cent of metal, all through its mountains. The real thing was far different. Not impossible to locate; for each year, even now, sees some new and fabulous lode opened up. But the scattered, thin deposit of this gulch would take a mountain railroad to develop it and the most expensive of electric process works to reduce it to metal. Take this ore back east and men could make money out of it, but that "take," that train-haul which would cost more than the ore was worth, was the rub!

For a moment a gorgeous vista of temptation opened up before Scotty. All he really needed to

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do to become rich was to go east with some of these picked specimens and float a "paper" copper mine, the kind that robs thousands of poor people of their earnings by false and visionary "literature"; that were never intended to do more than line the pockets of those scoundrels who make their living cheating the public that way.

But the mute reproach of the silent mountains to that temptation was enough for Scotty. Even the poor prospector with burro and pick who had come this way before had been too honest for that! He, some one of him, had without doubt explored this very valley long before Scotty; he had looked over this ore and gone on, knowing well that in practice it would never pay.

"Nothing doing!" said Scotty to himself, his honest soul recoiling in horror before the gilded prospect of a wildcat mine floated back east. "But, while there's life there's dope!" he grinned. "Where next? Dashed if I know! Let's break camp anyhow, Niltci."

The Indian youth grunted inquiringly from where he squatted, with the stoic patience of the Indian, under their brush shade. He pointed a coppery finger out at a lariat rope stretched between two mes-

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quites in the sunlight of the hill slope. On it hung a ragged collection of meat strips, like stockings on a clothesline. They still glistened, raw and red, in the hot blaze of the cloudless sky overhead.

"*Charqui* no done," he demurred, shaking his head. "Three sleeps yet."

He was referring to their store of dried venison; "jerky" as the cowmen call it, only he used the original Spanish name for it, *charqui*—dried meat.

"Gee, I'd forgot about our grub stake! Hope," observed Scotty, "springs infernal in the human breast, Niltci! Grub's our real problem, now. Let's let the mine wait and play hunters a bit, eh?"

As if to answer him the musical notes of a hound belled down from a distant mountain flank. There was sparse, dry-soil timber all over these hills, piñon, spruce, stunted western yellow pine and the inevitable aspens. The hills were bare and bony, and they blazed with orange and lavender color, for it was November, but there was game in the valley timber, lots of it, deer, cougar, bobcat, and an occasional cinnamon bear. Wild turkey inhabited the depths of the cañons, so plentiful that they formed the daily fresh meat of their camp in addition to

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the abundant trout which the Apaches disdained to catch and eat.

Scotty listened a moment to the musical notes floating down through the valley.

"There goes Ruler!" he cried. "Let's get the horses and see what he's after!"

Niltci, the Navaho boy, sprang to his feet grunting assent eagerly. His lithe form bounded down the slope towards a grass meadow, his red bandanna a blazing note of color, set off by an equally blazing white cotton shirt contrasting with his long, dark blue leggins which sparkled with rows of barbaric silver buttons. In a trice he was leading back Scotty's chestnut mare and his own flea-bitten desert pony. Ever since Niltci had miraculously "disappeared" during the religious excitements of his own people over the Black Panther, he had been with Scotty on his mining expeditions down here, far to the south in the Apache country of White River and far away from his own people. To his white friends he had owed his life that time—a debt that, to a Navaho, is never paid.

He handed Scotty the mare's halter and started deftly saddling his own pony. Ruler's bays came unceasingly down through the mountains. Their

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giant coonhound was of an indomitable persistence; he could be depended upon to follow that trail, whatever it was, for days on end without relenting.

“Up the coulée, Niltci!” shouted Scotty, vaulting his horse and clattering down the slope from camp. Behind him the fast hoofbeats of the Navaho’s pony followed. The mare crossed the creek bottom in a single jump and began working up the opposite flank in a long slant. On ahead an occasional yelp from Ruler gave inkling of his whereabouts. He was traveling fast, for the distance between them did not seem to close up. Frightened deer burst from cover and dashed down and across the stream bottom as they rode. A wild turkey, scared into flight by the showers of rolling stones struck loose by the horses, soared over the willows in the ravine and disappeared in a mass of thick green.

Then, behind Scotty, Niltci grunted eagerly and made a queer sound that was half a yelp.

“Yep! I see him, Niltci—cougar! There he goes!—regular old he-one!” gasped Scotty, jouncing in his saddle as he bent to drag his rifle from the holster. The mare shied as the heavy .405 swung out around her flanks. Scotty’s knees

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gripped her fast and he let the horse go with the bridle reins dropped over the pommel.

Ruler's deep tones now came back in explosive volleys.

"*Ow-ow-ow! Ow-ow-ow!*" he sang, belling a hot trail.

"Heading north, up the cañon!" yelled Scotty, galloping through the timber at full speed. "*Look at him go!*"

He pointed out a running cougar far up on the yellow mountain sides, galloping along in easy bounds that seemed effortless. His tawny body doubled and stretched out in the queer lope of the cat tribe, now trotting with fast-moving feet, now humping up in the swinging bounds of the gallop. He seemed very like a buff and white household cat magnified to enormous size. His tail drooped behind, tapering from a thick root seemingly as wide as his hips to a ropy furry length that undulated as he sprang easily up over the rock ledges.

"Gee, he's an old Tom, Niltci!" called back Scotty over his shoulder, "*Hi!-Hi!*—Go it, Ruler!"

The big reddish brown coonhound yodeled in answer. He was racing along perhaps halfway between them and the cougar, a red dot on the hot

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sunlight, bellowing forth bursts of hound music as he ran. Above them soared the high walls of the cañon, at least a mile up to the rim, yellow and blue-shadowed and dotted with dark green conifers. A hideous gulch, as it would look to a city dweller, terminated the cañon walls as they narrowed, and it was cleft high above by a dry arroyo that was all stones and boulders. But to Scotty this was the finest place on earth, and it was a jolly old world anyhow—in spite of mines that failed to pan out! His one anxiety was that the cougar might reach the timber up on the rim plateau and then turn on Ruler before they could get up there. The cat was far up, near the head of the gulch, and going even faster than they were. Like tiny Japanese pines the distant trees on the rim seemed to welcome him, and, while the panting horses and men labored hard up the slope, the cougar bounded over a ledge of broken rock and was gone into the timber.

Niltci grunted. "*Wah!*" he exclaimed disgustedly. "Lose dog! Cougar kill him! No good! Take pony quick—me climb up straight."

His little horse clattered close behind and Scotty reached back for the bridle. Niltci vaulted from the saddle and with quick lithe movements he began

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to climb vertically up the cañon slope. Scotty urged the mare on up the long slant that would bring him out somewhere near the beginning of the cleft that made the arroyo. He got two glimpses of Niltci's blue leggins swarming up over vertical ledges far above him; one brief sight of Ruler scrambling up over the rim ahead on the cougar's trail; and then he was all alone, with the empty, silent, gorgeous mountains brooding majestically around him. With his passing and the shower of stones that his pony was sending down, they would return again to the eternal peace that was theirs. Apache, frontiersman, cavalryman, prospector, all in their turn had come and gone, to disturb their meditations for a brief moment, to pass on leaving these lonely cliffs and pines their silent and inscrutable witnesses.

Scotty leaned over and whispered a word in the mare's ear. The noble creature was giving him her best, with the boundless generosity and disinterestedness of our four-footed hunting companions, but somehow, somewhere, she found it in her to call upon an extra burst of speed, some hidden reserve in response to her master's whisper. The top of the gulch was near now. With distended nostrils, with

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heaving flanks, and hoarse soughing breath the mare toiled up the last ledges and then vaulted over the rim.

An open country of great pines was that plateau. Shadows and sunlight flecked the needles under the huge *ponderosas*. Scotty saw a white flash running like a deer through the tree trunks—Niltci, who could run faster than a horse for a short spurt. He was far ahead, and as for Ruler, only a deep ringing bay told of his whereabouts.

“*Wahoo!—Wahoo!*” sang out Scotty, his whoops intended more to let them know he was up and coming than anything else. The pony he led behind him snorted and whickered at sight of Niltci and Scotty let him go free at the hint. The flea-bitten little mustang immediately loped on ahead in a fast clatter. This urged the mare to top speed again, for she would let no horse pass her, if wind and legs could prevent it!

Came a wild piercing screech and a savage miauling on ahead somewhere. It sounded hoarse and ropy and vengeful; terrifying; intended to strike a paralysis of fright into the creature attacked. Scotty realized that the cougar had turned to the attack, finding that only a dog was following him.

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Then Ruler's voice floated back, yelping and barking in a mixed medley of pain and fury. Scotty knew instantly what had happened. The old Tom was mauling the dog unmercifully. He would kill Ruler if help did not come instantly. Ruler was all of eighty pounds in weight but the cougar was at least two hundred and fifty and could beat him easily in a single combat.

A piercing whoop came from Niltci in answer to Ruler's cry of distress. Scotty at once whipped out the heavy .405 and its thunderous roar rang out. The mare ducked and shied under its cannonlike reports, but Scotty fired again and again, for he hoped the sound of the bullets ripping through the timber would frighten the cat into treeing if not too savagely engaged with Ruler.

As the mare burst out into an open glade, a wild drama under the pines across from it met Scotty's eyes. Ruler was dodging and giving back, the cat following up and striking again and again with a tawny and scimitar-clawed forepaw—bright flashes in the sunlight as of curved steel hooks. Niltci was racing across the clearing, his bright knife flashing in the sun, his wild black hair streaming out behind him. He was sprinting his utmost to save the

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hound but he would be too late if one of those terrible blows ever got home on Ruler!

Scotty threw the mare back on her haunches and raised a wabbling rifle barrel. The scene through the sights was not reassuring. Dog and cougar were so instantly changing places that it was impossible to fire. All this was happening with the quickness of thought, and Scotty felt reluctant to fire even a flash shot, for Ruler was whirling about so fast that he might run into the bullet while it was getting there.

And then a queer thing happened. *Another* tawny and grizzled body suddenly projected itself into the fray! Where *he* came from Scotty could not imagine, but a volleying bay of savage barks told him that it was no cougar but another dog.

Scotty stared for a moment, rifle lowered. Then—"Blaze!" he yelled in amazed delight—"Yeeoow!—Tear him, puppy!" he whooped. The giant Airedale launched himself like a gray thunderbolt surcharged with vim and power at the cougar's throat. As Scotty watched them, not daring to fire, the cat spun around and Ruler instantly seized a hock hold. Claws flew through the air. Blaze bounded about the cat like a rubber ball, just out of reach. A

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whoop of triumph came from Niltci as he closed in swiftly with upraised knife. For a tense instant Scotty sat watching a chance to fire from his saddle, his heart beating so that he could hear the pulses through his own open mouth. Then the cat whirled and soared through the air in one tremendous bound that carried him twenty feet away. He hit the ground running. There is no such speed as an old Tom can put on when in a tight place! He seemed literally to fly through the air, Blaze and Ruler a jump or two behind him. Niltci gave up the chase and snatched at the bridle of his pony as that faithful creature raced up after him. Scotty put spurs to the mare and galloped off in hot pursuit.

“*Hi! Blaze! Hi! Ruler!—Wahoo!*” he yelled, throwing the bridle over the mare’s neck. In answer a stentorian *Whoopie!* came ringing back through the forest. That was a *man’s* voice, and almost immediately following it there was a crash in the timber and a white horse thundered through the pines at right angles to Scotty’s course, the tree trunks seeming to pass the white flash of the horse like fence pickets.

“*Left!—Left!—You pisen—li’l—horned—toad!*” came Big John’s iron voice, jolting to the rhythm

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of his gallop. Scotty whooped back greeting at him and then wheeled obediently. The cat and both dogs were in plain sight ahead of him but Big John had an uncanny foresight in the ways of big game, and he had no doubt foreseen some sort of twist or short cut on the cougar's part. The timber cleared ahead of Scotty now, and out to the left in it he saw a giant pine, already dying of old age. For it the cougar had turned and was now racing at top speed. He ran up its huge bole like a cat climbing a tree, a shower of bark spalls raining down from his claws. At the first big dead branch he stopped and turned below his black muzzle, spitting and snarling from an open pink mouth at the dogs underneath. Ruler was prancing around on his hind legs, yelling with eagerness, while Blaze savagely scrambled up the trunk, to lose his grip and tumble down and indomitably attempted it again.

Big John reined in the white horse. "Now's yore chance to do the pretty, Scotty, old-timer—afore he jumps down—*shoot!*!" he yelled.

Scotty quieted the mare and raised the .405. Its enormous bellow rang out. The cat screeched and launched forth with all four claws spread in the convulsive flurry of death. He struck the pine

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needles with a heavy thud and instantly the dogs charged in, growling and worrying at him, while old Tom rolled over on his back and spun his claws in the instinctive defense of a cat in his last throes. Niltci clattered up on the mustang at that instant. In a flash he had leaped from his horse, bounded to the cougar's side and jumped away, leaving a red knife-handle sticking out behind the cougar's shoulder blades. Again there was a flash of his nimble body and the knife came out, while blood spurted six feet from the gash. The cougar groaned and stretched out on his side, quivering and sighing peacefully as if falling asleep. His eyes glazed; then the body stiffened and stretched in a last tremor.

Blaze ran up on the carcass and bared white fangs at Ruler. His attitude was crinky, cocky as a prize fighter's, and he honestly believed that he had killed that whole cougar all by himself! He dared Ruler to come on. As the latter had convictions of his own concerning that cat, a royal dog-fight seemed imminent—but Niltci seized the hound's collar and held him back by main force.

Big John laughed uproariously. "Hol' him, Injun!" he roared. "Ruler'll be gobblin' more'n he

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kin chow, fust ye know! That Blazie-boy's feelin' reel mean an' ornery, danged ef he ain't!"

Scotty laughed as Big John dismounted to boot the Airedale off the cougar, for Niltci had signified that he wanted to begin skinning out but wasn't any too anxious to go near the belligerent Blaze.

"Where's Sid, John?" asked Scotty, collecting his thoughts for the first coherent greeting that the swift action of the hunt so far had allowed.

The big cowman's eyes twinkled. "Sid, he ain't travelin' none, these days," he grinned. "He's back thar, somewhar, nursin' along a sort of present for ye, Scotty." He winked enigmatically at the youth.

"How come?" asked Scotty, mystified. "Present, eh?"

"Yaas, he'll come a-singin' with it, pronto. Some dago writin' on a piece of Injun pottery, 'tis. We-all was headin' for yore camp when we heard Ruler kyoodlin' back thar a-piece," he explained, "so Blazie and I, we 'lows to set in the game. But Sid he's afear'd to ride, which same's because he mought break that thar curio. We found it in one of them caves, after the most all-fired climb this hombre ever got inter, I'm settin' here to tell ye——"

"Here he comes, now!" interrupted Scotty,

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whipping off his sombrero to wave it at a new rider who came plodding through the pines with a led pack cayuse following him. "*Whoopee!*—Oh, Sid!" he yelled.

The rider waved back. The dogs put out for him pell-mell, Ruler leaping and fawning up on his saddle flanks, so overjoyed was he at seeing Sid again, the Airedale jealously shoving in to get his share of the caresses. Presently Sid rode up to where Big John and Niltci were busily skinning out the cougar and butchering big sections of the delicious meat.

"Hi, Sid!—what's all this Big John's telling me about a present?" Scotty greeted him. "Gosh knows, I was feeling pretty blue not so very long ago! Did you remember it was my birthday or anything?" he bantered.

"It's a *mine* for you, Scotty!" announced Sid, breathlessly, his eyes alight with the joy of him who gives, "an old Spanish mine! Got the dope here on a pottery tablet that we found in a cave dwelling."

"Gorry!—a mine!—le's see it!" cried Scotty. "A real, sure-enough mine? I'd begun to think there was no such thing left in Arizona."

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"It's at a place called Red Mesa, down near Pinacate, Scotty," said Sid. "The dope's all in Latin and I can't read much of it, but we'll hunt up a priest somewhere and get him to translate it——"

Scotty's face fell, even while Sid was speaking. "'Down near Pinacate!'" he echoed, huge disappointment in his tones. "It *can't* be, Sid! Why, that's all lava country! There's no mesa or mineral down there."

"How about the Ajo Mines?" challenged Sid. "And there's lots of ore north of Sonoyta, only it costs too much to work it. You know that yourself."

"By gosh, you never can tell!" exclaimed Scotty, excitedly. "It's possible, though! There's granite outcropping, even down at Macdougal Pass, only fifteen miles from Pinacate. We'll try it!"

"Hope it isn't in Mexican territory—but no, 'twenty-one miles northeast of Pinacate,' the plaque says——"

"Gee! Let's see it!" cried Scotty eagerly.

Big John grinned sardonic grins as the two youths got the plaque out of Sid's saddlebags and held it between them, scanning it excitedly. He heard

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Scotty eagerly bark out the word “‘aurum’—gold?” and shook his head.

“’Pears to me that every white man but me goes crazy over that word ‘gold’!” he growled whimsically. “Fellers will lie, steal, murder, get themselves killed with thirst or et by grizzlies—an’ all for somethin’ that they don’t want when they’ve got it!” he exclaimed. “Scotty, ef it warn’t for you bein’ a minin’ engineer I’d warn ye to leave it *alone!*” he said positively. “Exceptin’ it’s now November and the tanks is probably full down thar, I wouldn’t let you go, nohow.”

But Scotty was hardly listening to him. A planning look was in his eye and his engineer mind was already envisioning not the mine itself but the practical ways to get out the metal.

“Ship base in Adair Bay; burros up to the mine; carry the ore in bottoms through the Panama Canal to the East, where we can get cheap process reduction—Gee! There’s nothing to it!” he averred enthusiastically.

“C’rect—nawthin’ a-tall, li’l hombre!” grinned Big John sardonically. “No water; no feed for yore burros; no road—an’ no *mine!*” he declared.

“Yes, but ships, John!” urged Scotty. “That’s

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different. We can send out a year's supply of hay, oats and supplies for the camp just as they do at Las Pintas, and bring back the bottoms in ore. It's mighty different from some inland proposition, hundreds of miles from either rail or sea routes. If this tablet is reliable, the engineering side of it is a cinch! Let's hear the ethnologist."

Sid spoke up on this prompting: "We know well that all that country has been explored since the earliest times by the Spaniards," he contributed. "Sonoyta has been inhabited by them for over two hundred years, and one of their oldest missions is San Xavier, the one for Papago Indians who used to hunt all that country. The friars were Dominicans—D.O.M., you see. This Fra Pedro undoubtedly got his information from some Papago visitors to the pueblo tribes. He made that pottery record and had it fired while proselyting among the pueblos of the San Pedro River—probably named the river himself after his patron saint. It all fits in, see, John? Then he got wounded or hurt, somehow, in the general massacre of the friars in 1680 and died in the refuge of that cavate dwelling. The Indians buried his plaque with him in a sort of kiva.

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The thing seems straight enough to me," concluded Sid.

"Me too!" grinned Big John. "I gotto nurse you two pisen mean young reptyles down into that no-man's land—I see *that!*!" he snorted. "Waal, le's git back to yore camp, Scotty, an' I'll git the outfit ready. Niltci's goin', of course. We gotto hev at least *one* Injun down in that country. Thar's lots of mountain sheep down thar, an' that means hoss feed, galleta grass. We'll git a few prong horns (antelope), mebbe, out'n them lava craters. Ef the tanks is not dry, we kin resk it."

CHAPTER III

VASQUEZ

LEAVING Big John and Niltci hard at work making pemmican from the cougar and deer meat, and bags of pinole or parched corn meal from corn purchased at a near-by Apache encampment, Sid and Scotty rode a day's march through the mountains to where there was a mission school—San Mateo of the Apaches. Scotty's idea was to get the Red Mesa tablet translated by the teacher, who no doubt still remembered his Latin.

A small adobe schoolhouse of primitive Spanish architecture came in sight shortly after noon, surmounting a little knoll in the mountains. As they rode toward it Indian children, boys and girls, came running and yelling around them to beg pennies, and with them as an escort they rode up to the hitching rail before the school, dismounted and entered.

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A lone Mexican teacher, poor and of uncertain temper apparently, sat reading at the school desk as they entered. With an annoyed exclamation in Spanish he put down his book and came toward them during the time that their eyes were becoming accustomed to the dim light of the interior of the building.

“And what can I do for the señores?” inquired the man suspiciously, after the usual polite Spanish greetings had been exchanged.

Sid had already sized him up with a sense of misgiving, even then, before a word of their object had been disclosed. The Mexican—his nationality oozed out all over him—was a little weazened man, dirty, old, with one eye drooping nearly shut from some violent slash gotten during his past history. His face bore a sardonic, cynical, rascally expression, even under the smooth suavity of the crooked smile that now leered upon them. Sid felt like taking Scotty’s arm and leading him away, right then and there! Surely this man was no one to trust with such a mining secret as might be written on the Red Mesa tablet.

But Scotty had already guilelessly begun explaining their visit. His simple, “We have a Latin in-

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scription here, señor, that we would like you to translate for us," had settled it, for the man was already holding out his hand for the plaque which Scotty bore.

"You understand Latin, señor?" put in Sid, hoping that he didn't.

"Vasquez," supplied the Mexican, "ees my name. For the Latin, *si!*—indifferently," he shrugged. "Anything that my poor efforts can do to help you, though—" Once more he held out his hand for the plaque.

Again Sid felt that queer inner warning not to let the matter go further. He disliked any man who depreciated his own worth with every other word. Due modesty was admirable, but this groveling disdain of one's self was in truth but the inevitable expression of a fundamental lack of esteem for one's own integrity—and that usually came from a guilty conscience.

But it was too late now. Before Sid could obey a mad impulse to snatch the tablet away—no matter what explanations might be needed—no matter how absurd and incomprehensible and rude it might seem—the Mexican had begun reading the script on the pottery.

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“D.O.M.—Deo Optimo Maximo,” he rolled out in the sonorous Latin tongue. That was as far as he got in reading it out aloud to the boys. For, immediately thereafter, an expression of amazed, puzzled surprise came into his eyes as the boys watched him reading over the script to himself. Then Sid noted intense concentration, and this gradually gave way to an expression of crafty cupidity, an air of envisioning something other than the words that his eyes were falling on, of planning big enterprise, great affairs in connection with this tablet. Vasquez went on to read the script entirely through in a still, tense silence. Before he had finished, those snaky black eyes of his were fairly blazing with avarice. Talk of the power of the word “gold” to excite man! This man’s primitive nature stood stripped before the boys; revealed was an elemental desire for possession before which the rights of others, the entire veneer of civilization were stricken off as phantoms. He might as well have been some Mexican greaser griping at a pile of gold on some disreputable faro table along the border!

As Sid watched, the face before him looked up. Instantly it went blank, expressionless. There was a period of reflection, while the boys waited expec-

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tantly, then a crafty, planning look came into the eyes.

He folded the plaque under his arm—gesture of possession, which we are told, is nine points of the law.

Vasquez smiled—a practical declaration of ownership—a maddening, infuriating smile; the superior smile of the older man toward youth, which seems to question the right of the young man to busy himself with anything at all but the toys of childhood. Sid found it particularly unbearable. He had been smiled at that way before, when some staid and sophisticated professor had smiled indulgently at him over some of his own theories in Indian ethnology, theories which Sid propounded with all the fire of his youthful enthusiasm and conviction.

“Caballeros,” said the Mexican craftily, “this matter can have no possible interest to you, since it happens to refer to the work of the missionary brothers among the—ah, the Papagoes—” he hesitated, referring to the script as if to refresh his memory, his thought evidently being that the boys might have recognized that word in the Latin. “Over two hundred years ago this—ah, yes, missionary matter it is, my young friends—was written con-

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cerning our poor red brothers who lived down near Pinacate," Vasquez smiled down at them suavely.

Sid glanced at Scotty. The latter's Scotch nature was so incensed over this bald smiling perversion of what even his limited knowledge of Latin had told him was the truth that he was utterly speechless. "*Minem Argenti*" indeed! That meant "silver mine" at any rate! Scotty's faced blazed red, his eyes burned blue fire. As for Sid, he saw no use in prolonging this conversation further, for in craft the Mexican was more than his match. Boylike he preferred direct action.

"Sorry that I can't see it that way, *señor*," he replied shortly, gulping down his indignation. "I should be glad to furnish you with a copy of this tablet for your archives, if you wish," he conceded, "but that original plaque is mine."

He held out his hand for it with a gesture that told he was not to be trifled with further. Vasquez looked around desperately. Give him a moment more and he would think up some smooth reply that would at least gain time, perhaps argue the thing out of their very hands! But Sid made a determined lunge for him as the Mexican backed away.

At once the man raised his voice in a hoarse

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scream, "*Ladrones! Gringoes!*" he yelled, fending off Sid with a push of his hand while he turned the slide with the plaque under his arm away from them. Then he ran for a door at the back of the school. Shrill yells and the shouts of Apache came in answer to his call from outside. There was not a second further to lose! Scotty sprang for the man, lunging low in the football tackle for his legs, while Sid with a fierce and accurate grip of his strong hands tore the plaque away from under his arm, the scuffle sending the three rolling together in a heap on the dirt floor of the church.

"Quick! Make for that rear door!" barked Sid as he and Scotty leaped to their feet. Vasquez squirmed on the dirt floor of the schoolhouse, cursing horribly in Spanish and rocking to and fro as he hugged a sprained ankle. If looks could kill, the malignant fire that darted from his snaky eyes would have paralyzed them both! Sid raced for the rear door while Scotty stood guard over the man with threatening fists. The patter of running feet sounded outside the 'dobe walls. Then a leggined Apache, with long, matted black hair, stood blinking in at them in the blazing square of sunlight that was the front door.

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Sid had reached the back door. He looked in, then beckoned Scotty to join him. The boy raced over and, once inside the room, both boys slammed the stout panels behind them and let drop a heavy oak beam.

"There's a small window, with a mesquite bush growing out in front of it, Scotty—give me a stirrup hold!" gasped Sid, who was breathing heavily from their tussle.

He stepped up in Scotty's clasped hands and peered out the window, with one arm crooked over the edge. A mesquite grew just outside, and it was so heavily laden with dense clumps of mistletoe as to be in a dying state. Sid figured they might climb out into it and remain there undiscovered among the mistletoe clumps for a few moments. Outside he saw three or four Apache bucks running toward the schoolhouse from the grass huts perched upon the hillside. All over the village he heard an indescribable commotion of children and squealing squaws, but the Indians had no idea of what really was the matter. So far only Vasquez's screech for help had come to their ears.

Sid climbed out through the window and then reached down his arms to help Scotty up to its sill.

VASQUEZ

An uproar and a drumming of fists and impotent squalls in Spanish was sounding outside the oak door of the room as they both climbed out and gained the shelter of the mesquite. As the last buck outside ran into the school, Sid dropped to the ground and the boys raced for their horses. An outcry of Indian children greeted the appearance of the two fugitives, but none offered to interfere; only one little shaver had the presence of mind to run shrieking to the school door while Sid and Scotty were swinging up into their saddles.

“Now ride, Scotty, old scout—these Apache can *run!*!” grunted Sid, hanging low over his pinto and putting spurs to him. Scotty’s mare had no idea of letting that pinto leave her, so they galloped away from San Mateo together, leaving behind a cloud of dust and a riot of angry war whoops from the red men piling out of the schoolhouse.

Sid’s caution as to the running abilities of the Apache was entirely true. Behind them streaked out two lean and sinewy bucks, who had raced out of the school door and were coming after them like arrows. What was more surprising was the way they kept up that speed. The mare and the pinto were going like the wind, but not a yard did those

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Indians on foot behind them seem to lose! There was not a horse save their own in sight. But three men and a swarm of children were already running down the hill to where the ragged poles of a horse corral and the glint of a watering pond near by shimmered in the broiling sun. Even barebacked it would be some time yet before these could join in the chase, but when it was once begun it would be tireless.

Not a word passed between the boys. Both were watching sharp ahead for prairie dog holes and urging on their ponies at top gallop. If they could outrun those two bucks behind them for half a mile they would have passed the limits of even Apache endurance. Indeed, before half the distance between them and the friendly hills had passed, they saw first one, then the other, give up, with arms tossed up in weary abandon, as both bucks threw themselves panting on the bare plain. Sid and Scotty then let their ponies ride on at their own stride. It was well to have an extra spurt left in them to call on, even yet!

“Mucho bad, Sid; look back!” said Scotty, a short time after the menace of the foot-racers had disappeared and the two bucks had risen and begun slowly

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to retrace their steps back to the school. Sid turned half around in his saddle. Out from the high 'dobe façade of San Mateo were riding four horsemen and their leader was swathed in a gaudy striped Mexican serapé. Surely he was that rascally Vasquez. And he would follow them until doomsday for the Red Mesa tablet!

"The whole thing's bad, Scotty," replied Sid. "This fellow knows now what's written on the tablet. Nothing can take that knowledge away from him, either. We've got the plaque; but *he* has the knowledge it contains—and I'll bet it's indelible in his mind! They'll never catch us with those Indian ponies, but what's to prevent his reporting this Red Mesa mine to friends of his down in Mexico? What then?—you can have my shirt if a squad of their guerrillas doesn't cross the border, pronto, and get to Red Mesa first! See it? That's where we get off. I doubt if this fellow will follow us very hard. He knows all he needs to know right now."

Scotty rode on in silence. Indeed this business *had* been bungled! Far better would it have been for them to have ridden into Tucson and gotten some scientist whom Sid knew and could trust to read the Latin for them. The very word "Gold" is bad

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medicine to let get abroad among the sons of men! Many a miner's stampede has been started on less.

As the trail reached the foothills they drew rein and looked back. Far across the plain that little knot of horsemen was still coming on in the tireless lope of the Indian pony. Give them twenty miles of it and their own horses would be run off their feet!

"Here's where we've got to step light and easy, old-timer!" grinned Sid. "The Indians will be in their own country in these hills, and they know every short cut to head us off. I wish Big John and Niltci were here."

Scotty growled assent abstractedly as they rode up a bare and rocky arroyo. He was thinking of all that this Red Mesa mine meant to him. If it really existed, its nearness to the sea made the engineering problems of it so simple that it would be easy to get capital invested in it. Las Pintas mines, only thirty miles south of Pinacate, had already established a successful precedent for that, for it now had a little railroad of its own and a ship base, just as the young engineer had dreamed for Red Mesa. But now that Red Mesa's location was known to outsiders—and after being buried two hundred years, too!—the whole thing was a mess, and of his own naïve mak-

VASQUEZ

ing. The curse of trustful youth! There was just one point of hope. According to government regulations, whoever got there first and staked out a claim owned Red Mesa, now matter how discovered.

Scotty raged inwardly over it, driving his mare hard under that maddening goad of chagrin. Sid, who was less interested, followed phlegmatically behind. As the trail reached up high on the flanks of the mountains and headed up over a "saddle" into the next valley, Scotty rode ahead, dismounted and began climbing rapidly up toward the saw-teeth ridges that hung low in the sky above him. A persistent suspicion had haunted him ever since this ride had begun, and now he wanted that suspicion verified or dispelled.

As Sid passed below him then halted his pinto and waited, Scotty climbed on up and soon was peering through a ragged granite gap in the ridge. Below him fell away the bare, sage-strewn slopes and the low ridges of the foothills. Beyond that the great sunbaked plain of San Mateo lay like a floor. Up on its lonely hill, dim, in the blue distance, rose the school, yellow, and as Spanish as old Mexico. A mass of green around it told of water and of its permanent Apache colony.

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Scotty then searched the plain for signs of their pursuers. At first he thought they had followed them into the mountains, for the plain below was bare as a table. Then he drew back, with a shock of intense discouragement and misgiving, for his eyes had at last found them—riding along under the foothills, toward the *south!* There were two of the Indians following Vasquez who was quirting his pony mercilessly. The third Apache had disappeared.

“Gee!” groaned the boy anxiously. “He’s riding south! Toward the railroad! That means a telegram as soon as he can send one. And the third Indian is following *us!*”

He scrambled down and told Sid his news.

“Kick me for a rank tenderfoot, Sid!” he groaned. “Kick me from here back to camp, and then kick me clear on down to Pinacate! Gorry, but I let the cat out that time!”

Sid grinned. “Buck up, old settler!” he cheered him. “I knew we were in wrong as soon as I saw that greaser schoolmaster. To give the Red Mesa plaque to some benign old priest to read, yes; but this bird was just a sinful man like the rest of us. The temptation proved too strong for him. Gee,

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but you handed him our dope, as innocent as innocent! Whee! Big John'll think up something to do about it, though, and if he don't we will. Remember, too, that Mexico is the land of *mañana*. I doubt if they even get any one started up from Sonora before we can make a fast push and get there first, old scout, so don't worry. Besides, they can't cross the border, unless a party of guerrillas does it. And—they'd have a lot of explaining to do to get the grant of a claim from the government unless regularly entered as immigrants through Nogales—which is further from Red Mesa than we are. Our job, now, is to keep an eye on this third Indian. He was sent after us as a spy, to keep track of us and report, you can depend on that. We'll send Niltci after *him*."

Scotty rode on, more hopeful. Sid's rugged cheerfulness was what he always needed to brace him up. The one strong note in his character was his indomitable Scotch persistence. He never let go a thing once his mind was set on it, but he was easily disheartened and set back, for he had yet to learn that nine-tenths of our troubles exist solely in our imaginations.

It was nightfall when they reached camp. Not

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a sign had they seen of the third Indian, lurking in the hills somewhere behind them. That he had seen *them* was quite to be believed; he was probably watching their entry into camp at that very moment!

Big John hee-hawed when the boys told their story; then he jumped up, cackling hideously, grabbed Scotty and booted him all around the camp. "Thar!—Ye pisen li'l, ornery, horned toad!—Gol-darn ye—anyhow!" he guffawed, administering that kicking that Scotty had begged for but Sid had overlooked. "You boys ain't satisfied with draggin' me down to a country glowerin' with petrified lava, but ye got to add to my troubles by ringin' in a bunch of greasers on me! I tell ye what, Scotty, Pinacate means, 'Bug-that-stands-on-his-haid,' in Papago talk, an' durned ef I don't stand ye on *yore* haid, ef we don't find no mine—an' we won't! Up you goes by the heels, I'll be plumb hornswoggled ef I don't do it!"

"Yeeow—attaboy!" yelled Sid, enthusiastically. "Well, how come? We've got to shake off this Apache, first, or he'll follow us clear down to Pinacate. What's the word, John?"

"My idee's to do a leetle night ridin', son—and

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sorter leave Niltci behind," grinned Big John enigmatically. "Might's well be rollin' yore blankets right now, boys. The jerky's all done and Niltci's got it pickled away in a bunch of parfleche skins."

That night the four horses, with Ruler and Blaze on rawhide leaders, pulled out of camp in the silence and gloom after dusk. One horse, Niltci's flea-bitten mustang, was led riderless, his halter tied to the tail of Sid's pinto. The white mustang that bore Big John's long frame started ahead up the trail, a guide barely distinguishable in the faint light of the big Arizona stars. Black and inky buttes, jagged peaks and swelling ridges passed them in a slow procession around the horizon while Big John led on, stopping occasionally on the trail to reassure himself by some blazed stake set up in a cairn of stones or a rude corner of weathered granite rocks marking a turning point in the route.

The sun rose over the range of mountains left behind them next morning as the pack train wound down through the last pass in the hills and crossed the railroad track above Tucson. The horses were watered at a little river near the tracks, a river that was bravely hurrying on to its fate, to disappear forever in the thirsty sands of the desert to the

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north. Bare and rocky hills confronted them across the valley. As they headed into them Sid turned and looked back. A lone rider came galloping after them like a black speck hurrying out of the ranges across the valley. The whole party halted waiting for the rider, whether friend or foe.

It was Niltci, the Navaho, flinging along Indian fashion on a pony, his elbows flopping jerkily, his whole body swaying with the loose abandon of a rag tied somehow to the saddle.

"Well?" said Sid, as the Navaho boy overtook them, "what's become of Vasquez's Apache scout?"

Niltci's bronze face cracked once in a saturnine grin. "*Quien sabe?*" (Who knows!) he shrugged his dusty shoulders. "Me got hees pony!" That was all they ever had out of him about it.

"Them thar rails says we gotta lope along pronto, boys!" said Big John as he pushed the white mustang to the head of the column. "Yore schoolmarm friend has gone by hyar, in the cyars, shore's yore a foot high. 'Cause why? I didn't see no pony tracks headin' down fer Tucson, nohow, comin' down this valley."

"Think he's gone to Nogales, by train, John?" asked Scotty anxiously.

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"Shore has! Or else he's takin' the jerkwater local out of Tucson to San Xavier, so he can reach the Papago Reservation ahead of us. We'll be crossin' thet Injun ole folks' home soon as we git out'n these hills an' we'll shore hev trouble!"

Big John shook his head ominously and urged on the white mustang. For him the race for Red Mesa had already begun.

"Yes, but the Papagoes are harmless," objected Scotty.

"Not this time of year!" put in Sid. "This is corn time with them, and every other buck is drunk on a ferment that they make of it. That Vasquez could arouse them to almost anything, now.—Hey, John?"

"Shore, them Injuns is bad medicine for all white men in November!" quoth Big John sententiously.

They rode on in silence. A row ahead was tolerably certain, Sid thought. If Vasquez had reached them first by the railroad they would probably get a hot reception!

Two hours later their cavalcade filed out of the mountains and headed across a wide and hot plain. It was like riding into an entirely new world. Odd twisted and contorted cactus vegetation now

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covered the desert. Every plant and tree was different from anything the boys had ever seen before. Even the mountains were different, for instead of having the usual foothills they rose, gray and jagged and bare in the blue sky, abruptly from a flat and sandy floor. A faint tinge of green on their sides showed that the queer vegetation of this arboreal desert climbed up for a considerable distance even on that dry and inhospitable soil.

In front of them stretched a wide and flat plain, clear to the bases of the distant gray mountains. Sparse galleta grass and patches of gray sand dotted with creosote bushes covered it. There were clumps of mesquite, looking like dwarfed and twisted locust trees; here and there a bright green patch which, on riding closer, developed on to a *palo verde*, its bright green branches and twigs a dense lacery of glistening green. Sid rose close to one, looking for its leaves for apparently it had none. They were infinitesimal, spiky little things, adding nothing to its beauty, which he saw came entirely from the *palo verde's* masses of sap-green branches.

As they rode further to the southwest, multitudes of what looked like tall green fence posts appeared. They covered the ridges, each as straight as a lance

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and as thick as a tree. They were small saguarro or giant cactus, ribbed and pleated in green, and covered with thorns. Further west they grew larger and put forth branches like huge candelabra.

To Sid's naturalist soul all this arboreal desert was weird and beautiful and interesting. The tree choya, a clubby specimen with stiff branches of thorn bristles at the ends of crooked branches, began to appear; then the ocatilla, the "Devil's Chair," as Big John called it, a tree with no trunk but with more arms than an octopus and each branch covered with thorns and small green leaves bunched along a green stem as hard as iron.

Towards evening, across the gray-green miles, a small brown *visita* or mission outpost came to view. It was merely a large hut of adobe, but the bell in its upper tower told its purpose instantly. The boys thrilled as they looked at it, for they were now nearing the Papago Reservation and it was quite possible that Vasquez had forestalled them by train from Tucson.

Big John reined in the white mustang. "Nobody to home, thar, these days," quoth he. "The Injuns is all away at the cornfields. We gotta ride in thar

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though, an' help ourselves to water afore these hosses kin go further."

Sid would have preferred to keep away, but there was no choice. Water was king in this country! They *had* to get it, if it meant encountering a thousand malignant school-teachers. Vasquez's subtle Spanish mind had no doubt led him to reason that they *must* come here. But what redskin reinforcements he might have picked up in that lonely mission station imagination could not conjecture.

Slowly the miles lessened; the building loomed up brown and enigmatical in the setting sun before them. 'Dobe houses, each with a mesquite pole veranda in front, appeared like magic among the green stakes of saguarros on the hillsides; then a round stone oven out in the valley near the school-house became plain to sight.

They were perhaps yet a mile away when around the corner of the building appeared a man on horseback. A cape or serapé of some sort hung over his shoulders, but it was too far away to get any sense of color from it. Niltci squinted his keen eyes and gazed at him long and fixedly while the others reined up.

"Mexicano!" he ejaculated.

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"Sho' is!" agreed Big John. "I'll bet my hoss it's that bird who tried to steal your tablet, boys!"

Sid and Scotty fumbled for their hunting binoculars. A moment later they had trained them on the man.

"It's *him*, John, all right!" cried Sid. "Now what do we do?"

The rider in the serapé answered that question himself, for, wheeling his horse, he galloped off at full speed.

"Ride, fellers! Burn it up!" roared Big John. "We got about *no* time to git in thar an' water our hosses. He'll be back, right sudden, with the hull b'ilin' of drunken Injuns!"

CHAPTER IV

PINACATE

IN a lather of foam the four horses raced in to the deserted Papago village. 'Dobe houses with small blunt chimneys dotted the hillside, but there was not so much as a dog in sight. The well was easy to find—a cube of palings built around a curbstone to keep wandering burros from falling in. It topped a low knoll and had a primitive windlass lowering a bucket into its depths.

Ten minutes of sweating activity followed, Sid and Scotty scanning the hills anxiously while each horse drank his fill; the two dogs lapped up a hatful from Big John's sombrero; then all the canteens were filled.

"Now roll yore tails, boys!" urged Big John, flinging himself up on the white mustang. Sid looked to his stirrups and mounted the pinto in a running jump. Blaze and Ruler barked excitedly as the horses clattered up a steep slope that led

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through a gap in the hills. What *might* be on the other side of that ridge!

From its summit they saw a wide arboreal desert stretching away below, bounded on the west by a red, saw-tooth range of silent mountains. The rays of the setting sun swept across the plain, lighting up each saguarro pole in a spike of vivid green. But over in the hills to the east was coming a long file of riders—the Papagoes! They wound down a defile, galloping at full speed, and a tiny horseman swathed in a flying, striped serapé led them.

“Now, fellers, we shore got a race ahead of us!” declared Big John. “We’ll make for Red Tank, out thar in the middle of this valley. See them two little ’dobe houses? That’s her. Head for them ef any of ye git separated.”

Across the waste of creosote bushes, choyas and giant cactus that was the Baboquivari Desert galloped the whole party, heading due west toward the red water pond which lies about the center of it. Near its borders Sid could see the two ’dobe Papago houses, still ten miles off, yet they showed as tiny landmarks, even more noticeable than the many-branched giant saguarros which dotted the plain. Beyond them rose the Quijotoa mountains, abrupt

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and sheer, bare as the ribbed sides of a cliff. They were twenty miles away, but seemed quite neighborly, a refuge to ride for, a place for a stand-off fight if need be.

"Gee!—regular movie stuff!" chortled Sid to Scotty as he looked back over his shoulder again. Vasquez and his muster of motley Papagoes were crossing from the east but had not gained a yard on them yet. But they surely would, by the time those 'dobe houses were reached! The horses could keep their distance easily—at first. In time these tireless Indian mustangs would ride them down, sure as death!

"We'll stop and stand 'em off from those 'dobe houses, eh?" answered Scotty. "My old .405 will be the boy then, you bet!"

"Won't be no movie scrap, nohow!" growled Big John back from where he and Niltci were breaking trail. "The real thing don't pan out that way. Ride, fellers! All tarnation won't stop these horses from drinkin' up the pond when we git thar, an' we gotta make time so's to let 'em do it. You, Blaze," he stormed at the big Airedale loping along beside him, "I gotta turn ye loose, now, spite of thorns ketchin'

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yore coat. Cayn't take no more chances with this leader."

Big John hauled up the huge fury Airedale on his saddle as he rode, unsnapped the leash and let him drop again. Twice before during the race the white mustang and Blaze had run on different sides of the same bush—with almost disastrous results but he had been still more afraid of thorns catching and holding the woolly-coated Airedale. Ruler had no such danger. The big hound loped along easily beside Sid's pinto and his sleek sides passed the thorns like silk.

In half an hour more of twisting and turning through the arboreal desert seven miles of the distance had been covered. They still maintained perhaps two miles of lead over the Papagoes, in spite of the furious urgings and gesticulations of their leader in the striped serapé.

Big John glanced a sardonic eye back at him occasionally. "Greaser—I'd plumb dote on stoppin' a leetle lead with ye!" the boys heard him mutter through his clenched teeth, as he galloped along. "But them good old days is gone forever, now. We gotto put up a tin-horn game on ye instead."

Just what the hoax was going to be neither Sid

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nor Scotty could conjecture, but they knew Big John's resourcefulness of old. They rode on silently, wondering, nursing the horses around the surprising twists and turns that Niltci ahead saw fit to make, usually to avoid great beds of bristly choyas. Both the mare and the pinto were breathing heavily now, and snorting in labored wheezes through their foaming nostrils. The pace was beginning to tell! The 'dobe houses loomed up not two miles off, but behind them came that tireless knot of Papago riders, light and lithe, and they could keep this up all day!

Then came a yelp of pain from Blaze. The Airedale, in leaping to avoid a spiky choya, had slammed full into a bushy acacia whose incurved cat claw spines showed no intention of letting go again. Doglike, he stopped still, waiting for his master to extricate him and not trying to tear himself loose. Big John let out a round oath and flung himself from the white horse while the rest all stopped.

"Get out yore .405 and let her talk, Scotty," he barked, "she can outrange anything they've got, an' this yer dawg's goin' to make us take time out."

Faint yells from their pursuers and the waving of rifles by upflung arms greeted the stoppage of their party. The cowman cut rapidly at the tufts of kinky

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hair that held Blaze fast, while Scotty yanked out his big rifle and ran back a short way to hide behind the cover of a giant saguarro. The distance between the parties closed up rapidly; to one mile, to half a mile, while Blaze whined and groaned, with mute fang laid protestingly on Big John's bony hands as one by one the cat-claws were cut loose from his coat.

Then the .405 whanged out and its bullets screamed high in the air. A puff of dust flew up in front of the Mexican rider's mustang and he checked his horse viciously. The Indians around him, looking more like a collection of disreputable tramps than the real thing, reined up and presently puffs of white smoke came from them, followed by the faint pop of their weapons.

At one of the shots Niltci suddenly threw up his arms and tumbled off his horse. Sid gasped with dismay, but to his astonishment the Indian boy was now wriggling off through the sage like a snake! He left his gaudy Navaho blanket behind, though, and Sid caught Big John's eye winking at him. Evidently this was part of a ruse!

"You, Sid—make believe you was bending over something," grunted Big John. "Thar, Blaze, yore

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free, old-timer! Now bring me that flea-bitten cayuse of Niltci's, Siddy boy."

Grinning, the youth held Niltci's horse for him while Big John flung the blanket over Blaze, lifted him up on the saddle, and sprawled him out with his collar tied fast to the pommel horn. "Come on in, son!" roared Big John to Scotty as he threw a turn of rope around the dog's back and vaulted up on the white mustang himself. "Now ride for all yore wuth, boys!"

"But Niltci—how come?" gasped Sid. "Are we going to leave him?"

"Never mind Niltci—he's some busy, 'bout now. Hep, boys!" retorted Big John, putting spurs to the mustang. Indeed, as Sid looked around for him, Niltci had disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him up. He himself rode on lightheartedly. Shots rang out behind them and the puff of sandspurts kicked up the desert floor near by, but the Papagoes' shooting was wild and the range a good deal too great as yet. The four horses swung down toward the first 'dobe house and Big John quickly led Niltci's cayuse behind it and stopped them all.

"Them Injuns *may* hev taken Blaze under the blanket fer Niltci wounded—an' again they mayn't!"

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"We've got 'em guessin' anyhow," he grinned, peering out around the corner. "Sid, you take the hosses to the pawnd, an' water 'em, while Scotty and I sorter dally with these excited hombres a leetle." He dragged out his old meat gun, a .35 with a mouth like a young cannon and a knockout punch. "C'mon, Scotty, le's mosey!"

Around the corner of the house they looked out and back across the plain. The Mexican rider had reined in at long rifle range. His Indians were dismounting and creeping out through the bushes to right and left while one of them held all their horses by a handful of halter ropes. Finally the Mexican also dismounted and joined them in the ambush attack. Their idea was evidently to creep up close and then carry the house by a simultaneous rush.

"Fooled 'em, all right!" grinned Big John. "They shore think that Niltci got hurt in the shootin' an' we brought him in hyar lashed to his saddle. Let 'em come! You an' I mought's well be a-sprinklin' the sage, Scotty, so as to make it more excitin'. Don't shoot nobody—tain't wuth it."

He went to the other corner of the house and opened fire with the .35. Nothing loath, Scotty tore loose with the monstrous shout of his big .405. It

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made a fine noise, and its bullets ripped and ricochetted across the sand, throwing up small shell-spouts like a naval gun. Answering shots and the whizz and smash of lead bullets striking the building told the youth that this was not all play. Whatever story Vasquez, if it was he, had told the Papagoes it had evidently aroused them to an unwonted fury. It all seemed incredible, preposterous to Scotty. The Bean-Eaters were the most peaceful of red men. Were it not corn time he could not have believed that they were really fighting in earnest.

"Got them hosses watered, Sid?" called out Big John presently. "Bring 'em hyar; show's comin' off, pronto."

Sid led the horses back under the shelter of the house and ran to help in the defense. Shots rang out in the sage, coming from both sides on their flanks. It was getting high time to move on, before one of the horses should be hit. Sid aimed carefully behind a puff of white smoke that rose from a creosote bush at his right, and let go with his .30 army carbine. Before he could watch the result a yell and a shout of laughter from Scotty spun him around. Out there on the plain a funny thing was happening. The Indian in charge of the Papagoes'

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horses had now apparently mounted one of them and was riding off with the entire bunch!

It was several seconds before Sid realized the truth—that that white rider with the red bandanna about his foreheard *could* be none other than Niltci himself! While Sid had been shooting, the Navaho boy had crept up through the sage, knocked down the Papago holding the horses and ridden off with all of them!

At sight of this disaster a chorus of vengeful whoops rose out of the desert all around them and two or three Papagoes leaped from cover in a futile spurt to catch the runaways. Sid could have bowled them over easily but he was instantly recalled by Big John's shout.

“Mount and ride, boys!” the big cowman was yelling. He himself leaped up on the white mustang and the boys followed hard after, riding along the banks of the red pond. A flock of teal rose in a great flutter of wings and there were yells and imprecations behind them from out in the creosote bushes, but they waited not to hear them. Big John was guffawing so that he could hardly keep his saddle. “Sing, redskins!—Yell, ye pisen horned toads! Ain’t it a grand an’ glorious feelin’ to be

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set afoot though!" he shouted back at them. "Gosh durn it, boys, I ain't hed so much fun since we made Apache Sam eat a rattlesnake! Niltci an' I, we cooked up thet hoss-thievin' stunt whilst ridin' out hyar. Blaze, he jest nat'rally helped!"

As for Niltci, he was now making a wide circle around the other side of the pond, leaving behind him the screaming and fist-shaking Vasquez, who stood in the sage searching his soul for Spanish expletives that would relieve his feelings! Niltci rode in to join them shortly after, with all the Papago ponies following him and a broad grin on his face.

"*Mucho bueno!*" he grunted. "What do with pony?"

"Oh, we'll pilgrim along a while, an' then drop 'em after dark somewhar near the Quijotoas," laughed Big John. "Fine work, Injun! I reckon we're shut of that outfit for a piece, eh, boys?"

"Not to be a crape-hanger, I'd say that we won't see another Mexican unless it's a bunch of guerrillas down near Pinacate," said Sid.

"Shore! More fun!" grinned Big John. "Them rebel greasers has Mausers—but they cayn't hit nawthin' with them. Hope that Vasquez person

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aims to round 'em up an' bring 'em along. 'Twell be some fine li'l party, I'm settin' hyar to tell ye."

They rode on and dropped the Papago ponies shortly before pushing through the pass in the Quijotoas to Poso Blanco. There they encountered a new village of Papagoes and the inhabitants lined up to watch them go by. Big John, nothing loath, bought oats from them, as friendly as friendly! They, of course, had heard nothing of the row over at Red Tank. Some of them even did their best to sell the party baskets!

"Shore, but a runner from Red Tank will git in hyar late to-night, fellers," quoth Big John, as they rode out on the desert once more. "This lot of Injuns'll be some surprised, I'm thinkin'! We'll water at Poso Blanco an' pull our freight for ole Montezuma Haid early to-morrow morning, or the hull kadoodle will be on our heels."

After dark a dry camp was made, in a patch of mesquite and palo verde, a long distance out from Poso Blanco. It had been a hard day of riding! Fifty miles, in all, had they covered, and now the country was changing from gray to red, and lava began to show up, black and glowering under the horses' hoofs.

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It was sharp and chilly in the dark before dawn when Big John roused out the camp next morning. "Now, fellers, we'll water for the last time at Wall's Well by sun-up, an' then make a long pull through the gap in the Growlers, which same brings us to Represa Tanks on the Camino del Diablo. You-all hev never been thar, an' hev no idee what it's like, but the Spaniards told the truth, fer once, when they named it the Road of the Devil. Thar's always water in Represa, an' from thare we kin work out to Cerro Colorado, the first of them extinct volcanoes. If Red Mesa's twenty mile northeast of Pinacate, as that pottery slate says, you'll see her from thar."

The horses, freshened and invigorated with grass feed and the cool of night, led off spiritedly, all four riding together in a bunch. In two hours more the sky began to lighten in the east and then a shaft of red sunlight struck into living fire the top of a mountain that rose ahead of them, solitary and shrouded like a monk—Montezuma's Head. Sid held his breath in wonderment, to see the red bath of color spread down the flanks of that huge and imposing presence, widening and broadening its base with color, bringing out the vivid green posts of

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saguarros, the dark greens of creosote, and the white patches of barrel cactus wrapped in their dense mantles of thorns. They were in the heart of the giant cactus country now. The floor of the desert was dotted all over with them. Everywhere their weird candelabra shapes stood like sentinels, upholding bent and contorted arms, notes of bright green on a gray and pale green waste.

As they rode nearer, Sid raised a shout of discovery. "First organ pipe cactus!" he whooped, pointing excitedly. "See it? Up yonder on the hill!"

Out of a cleft in the rock rose a nest of what seemed to be tall and crooked green horns, bunched together like some coral growth of the depths of the sea. A queer plant, but all this country was filled with these dry-soil and water-storing species, and nature did queer things with them to make them able to survive.

Under the towering ramparts of Montezuma's Head the horses were watered and canteens were filled. The wide flat stretch of arboreal desert across to the Growlers lay before them. It would be twenty miles of riding in the hot sun. Extra bags of feed were bought and hung over the saddle bows

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before they started, and from a lone cowman, an old settler who had come here for peace and quiet, Big John borrowed a five-gallon canvas water bag.

That "valley" was a flat stage floor, surrounded by an amphitheater of bare, granite mountains. They rose all about them, interminable distances away. Yet every mile of that crossing proved interesting, for the boys never grew tired of studying this abundant desert plant life. Saguaroos in troops and regiments marched up and over the ridges or filled in the foregrounds of mesquite and palo verde at appropriate intervals. Patches of galleta grass that simply could not be ignored invited the horses to a step and a munch of fodder. Gambel's quail ran through the bushes in droves and caused many a chase and much popping of the small six-shooters that the boys carried. An occasional road runner darted through the creosotes, long-legged and long-tailed. Desert wrens sang from the white choyas where their nests lay adroitly concealed from predatory hawks. It was high noon before the Growler mountains were reached. They rose abruptly out of the plain, so very steep and sudden that Scotty was convinced that the foothills that properly belong to all mountains *must* lay

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buried in the sand underneath the horses' hoofs. A minute before, the cavalcade had been trotting easily across a table-land like a hall floor; in the next step the horses were laboring up a steep and rocky trail that raised them higher and higher with each step.

At an elevation of some eight hundred feet they paused in a gap that broke through to the west and the party spied out the land spread out like a map below. Red and jagged mountains rose across the flat valley of a red and scowling land below them. A blue haze enveloped it all, out of which rose dark purple cones of extinct volcanoes, hundreds of them. It all seemed a black and purple mass of peaked hills, devoid of vegetation, sizzling in the sun. "Petrified hell," Big John had well named it!

As they looked, the haze of vapors shifted slowly, and out of the far distances appeared for a brief while a faint line of higher mountains, culminating in a couple of smooth and wrinkly teeth etched faintly against the blue.

"That's old Pinacate, boys," said Big John. "Look hard at her; for you won't see her again for a long while yet."

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“Pinacate or bust!” said Sid solemnly. “Red Mesa must be somewhere between here and it, then, John, since we are now due northeast of the old boy.”

“Mebbe,” retorted Big John, shaking his head. “Search me! If thar’s a mesa, such as we have up in the Hopi country, anywhere down hyar—I’ll eat it! Hey, Niltci!”

The Navaho youth grunted negatively. He had the keenest eyes of them all. If there *was* a mesa, such as he was familiar with in his own country, he would have been the first to spy it out and exclaim over it.

“Welp! Let’s get movin’,” said Big John. “Thar’s a leetle tank somewhere down this trail, ef she ain’t gone dry. She don’t last long after the rains in this country.”

He and Niltci started on down the granite, but Sid and Scotty tarried to look out once more over this lava land, iron-bound and torrid in the heat of midday.

“Lord, what a country!” exclaimed Scotty, dejectedly. He was disturbed to find himself frankly afraid of it. Nothing here to exercise his construc-

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tive engineering instincts upon! Nothing — but Death!

“To me it’s a challenge,” retorted Sid brightly. “It’s still another mood of grand old Dame Nature, of whose wonders there is no end! She cares nothing at all for Man; but each new aspect of her is a challenge to him to stay alive, if he dare. Doctor Hornaday”—Sid pronounced the name with all the fervor of boyish hero-worship — “he dared this country once, and discovered that mountain sheep and antelope had a refuge here. Those granite mountains across from us to the north of Pinacate are named after him. This lava looks good to me, for it makes a game sanctuary of this country forever. Except for your sake, old man, I’d rather there never *was* a Red Mesa mine.”

Scotty shrugged his shoulders impatiently. He was fast falling into a mood that had often been fatal to him before, that of trying to rush a thing through, jumping to a conclusion on presumptive evidence and then acting on that conclusion immediately, without trying out that homely old remedy known as “sticking around a bit.”

“Well, le’s push through to Cerro Colorado and have it over with, Sid,” he urged. “If there’s no

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Red Mesa, the sooner we find it out and get away the better."

But by nightfall they had reached only Represa Tank. It was an enormous run that their tired horses had made, for that hot country, had Scotty's impatience only admitted it. The tank was a muddy little hole with a small oasis of grass and a grove of mesquites surrounding it. Near by was the famous Camino del Diablo, the thirst-haunted road to Yuma, one hundred and thirty miles away to the west—all dry desert travel. Big John and the boys sauntered out to look at it after supper. Up through a gap in two red lava hills led the old trail, a sure-enough road, as good (or bad) as the day it was made. Looking southeast behind them, the thing lost itself in the bushes of the Tule Desert. Why or when it had been built, the boys had no idea.

Big John regarded it solemnly for a while. "Injuns, Greasers, prospectors an' sodjers—they all had a purple time of it along this trail, boys!" he exclaimed. "More'n four hundred people hev died along this Camino del Diablo, of thirst, exhaustion, an' jist plumb discouragement."

Scotty shook his head ruefully. "Let's make a break for that Cerro Colorado hill to-morrow,

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John," he urged. "It's about twenty miles northeast of Pinacate, so Red Mesa *can't* be more than five miles from it and directly between it and Pinacate. Ought to be a cinch to find it, if that plaque is O. K. And, if we don't, we'll clear out, pronto, and waste no more time on it, eh?"

"I've never climbed Red Hill myself, son," said Big John. "But as for clearin' out—we *cayn't*! Not yet awhile."

Sid grinned delightedly. "How come?" he asked, all interest.

"What think? Ef four men goes to chowin' man's food, in alligator-sized doses like you boys hev been doin' for the last four days, how long d'ye suppose three skins of pemmican will last?" asked Big John sardonically. "We're almost out of meat, boys. We'll try Cerro Colorado to-morrow, an' then, Red Mesa or no Red Mesa, we rolls our freight for them Hornaday mountains whar thar's mountain sheep an' antelope. Shoot or starve—that's us, old timer!"

"Suits me!" caroled Sid. "We've got to stock up before we start back, eh? Well—what did we bring Ruler and Blaze along for, anyhow!" he demanded enthusiastically.

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Scotty was silent as they went back to camp. He was silent, too, and anxious all through the ride to Cerro Colorado next morning. Face to face with the reality, with these vast fields of scowling lava, with the dry and level plains of endless creosote bushes, with these parched and stunted bisangas, choyas, and saguarros, his dream shriveled and faded. A mine! Here, in all this five hundred square miles of barren lava! A railroad to it! How cross the grim ranges of Pinacate, looming up now not twenty miles away to the west? It all seemed so hopeless! It would take a far sterner and more determined man than he to push through such a project!

But Sid sang happily as they rode toward Cerro Colorado. This wild, free land struck a response in the deepest notes in his being, the love and enjoyment of that freedom that every explorer, every pioneer, every adventurer feels to be his most precious birth-right; for which he will sacrifice ease, comfort, wealth, civilization itself. New species of this marvelous desert life constantly claimed his attention. White trees, fluffy in foliage as cotton, appeared. "Smoke Trees," Big John named them. A new bush, all frosty white, met them along the march,

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securing a roothold even in crevices between red and sterile lava chunks as large as a ragged rock boulder. He recognized the species as the Brittle Bush and would have tried breaking its twigs except for the formidable and glistening thorns with which it was armed. Then came a vast carpet of lowly little plants that seemed made of frosted silver and Big John drew rein. He inspected them closely and then scanned the neighboring craters and all the vast plain about him with keen eyes.

“Antelope fodder, fellers!” he announced. “Whar ye see thet leetle plant, thar’ll be pronghorns. They love it better than grass.”

No antelope were in sight, however. Even if so, they would be quite invisible under that burning sun. The horses loped on. Gradually there rose out of the desert a low hill, sheered off flat at its summit and covered with the dense lacery of creosote bushes. Cerro Colorado it was, and they picketed the animals out and began to climb its rocky slopes. Rough, sharp lava, in boulders of all sizes, marked the lava flow of geologic times from this hill; indeed the whole plain below was made entirely of the outpourings of this one crater. Once

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on its top they looked out over the country between them and Pinacate, who loomed up grim and imposing in the west and surrounded by his wide and desolate lava fields. Twenty dreary miles away was he!

Sid had carried with him the Red Mesa plaque, bearing its enigmatical message in Latin which Fate had not permitted them yet to have translated and he now produced it for that last reading. The words they knew were still there, staring up at them from its red pottery surface.

“XXI Milia S-O ab Pinacate—Minem aurum et argentum—In Mesam Rubram”—there was no mistaking *that!*

But the more they pored over the words the more unbelievable they became! It was surely a cruel joke, a wild tale that the Papagoes had brought to that old priest, Fra Pedro. It must be—*now!* For, below them stretched a vast plain, stippled all over with creosote bushes, clear to the base of Pinacate itself, twenty miles away! There was no Red Mesa, no hill of any sort on that plain! If those bearings on the plaque were true, Red Mesa ought to be in plain sight, right now, and not over five miles

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away! But there was nothing of the kind, anywhere in sight!

Scotty finally turned to look at Sid, silent misery in his eyes. His dream had vanished. Already his thoughts were turning to the future. His next letter to his mother would *not* be the triumphant announcement of a valuable claim staked out, a triumphant return east to organize a company, but —well, nothing much; nothing but perhaps a brief note, saying that he had got a job somewhere.

Sid gripped his hand sympathetically. There was nothing to say. If Red Mesa existed it certainly was not here.

“Cheer up, old top; le’s forget it and go hunting!” he grinned.

But Scotty’s tenacious persistence now came to his rescue. He turned to Big John. “There’s a mine around Pinacate *somewhere*, John, sure as we stand here!” he gritted. “I doubt if the Papagoes of that day knew how to tell that friar east or west in Spanish very clearly. And a mine wouldn’t be found in this lava but in granite outcroppings if I know anything about mining. I’m game to stay here and look for it, boys, while you’re hunting sheep.”

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“Yaas, you pore lamb!” said Big John soothingly.
“I’ll tell ye: Them Hornaday mountains *is* granite.
An’ they’re twenty miles northwest of Pinacate!
Put that in yore face an’ chaw it, if it’s any com-
fort to ye.”

CHAPTER V

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ACROSS a bare and sandy divide wallowed and crunched a weary party of horses, men, and dogs. Bare and desolate mountains surrounded them, and one rose in sheer gray granite, capped by a black stratum of lava, apparently two hundred feet thick. Of even desert vegetation there was not a trace here. The sand buried everything, even the mountain sides. One could hear the faint lisp-lisp of it, moving stealthily along, grain by grain, under the flow of the southwesterly winds rolling up from the Gulf of California.

“Shore this is the country that Gawd jest didn’t know *what* to do with!” ejaculated Big John, mopping his sweating forehead and getting a new bite on the corner of his bandanna with his teeth. “Whar’s yore desert gyarden, hyarabouts, Sid?”

“We’ll come to it, just over the ridge—according to the map made by the Hornaday expedition,” replied Sid cheerily. For perhaps the twentieth time

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since they had left Represa Tank early that morning, that little book-page map was taken out and scanned by the whole party. Big John always liked to convince himself, by standing on the map as it were, that they were really following it. In these endless dunes it would be easy to take the wrong gap and miss MacDougal Pass altogether.

“See?” said Sid, pointing out the landmarks, “that range ahead of us they named the Hornaday mountains. They abut on the Pass in a right angle. I’d give a lot to know what’s in that angle behind them! *No* one knows. There’s a little piece of the earth for you, Scotty, as unexplored as the North Pole!”

Scotty said nothing. He had not yet recovered from the disappointment of finding Red Mesa apparently a myth. The whole business looked worse than ever now. Even assuming that the Papagoes might have been confused in translating east and west and so have given Fra Pedro the wrong compass bearing, twenty-one miles northwest of Pinacate would be *right here*, where they were now riding—and there was no such thing as a mesa in sight anywhere! The mountains here were all of rugged gray granite, tumbled and saw-toothed, with faint tinges of green showing where some hardy desert

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vegetation had got a roothold. Mesa! This was volcanic country, all cones or jagged outcroppings of granite! thought Scotty, disconsolately.

He rode on dejectedly after Niltci and the dogs, who were scouring the sand for game tracks. A short way from here the first tracks of sheep had been seen by the Hornaday party, and further south antelope had been shot by John Phillips in the craters of the extinct volcanoes which dotted this country.

“There she is—there’s the Pass!” cried Sid triumphantly, as they topped the last of the awful sand ridges. His pointing finger showed them a river of desert vegetation below, a broad and rolling green river that flowed through the flat sandy plain of the Pass in masses of rich, living color. Tall green saguarros, like telegraph poles, rose in monumental spikes along the granite bases of the mountains on both sides. White fields of Bigelow’s choya barred their way, in big patches of them flung broadcast across the sands. Here and there the bright green puffball of a palo verde made a note of vivid color against the prevailing dark shiny green of the creosotes. At sight of all that verdure the horses broke into a run, twisting and threading

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through the flat bare sand lanes. The dogs, now desert-wise, galloped along beside them, barking excitedly and hardly noticing the choyas, avoiding them instinctively.

And then Ruler gave tongue. *Ow-ow-ow!* he sang, the first blessed musical notes of the chase that had come from his throat since they had left the Catalinas! Niltci whooped a shrill challenge and lashed his mustang to full speed. After him put out Big John, and then Scotty, glad of any excitement to take his mind off his troubles. Sid rode leisurely after them, merely glancing down at the tracks the dog had discovered in the sand.

“Buck mule deer—a small one. Here, Blaze!—Heel!” he called sternly to the Airedale, who had started bounding after Ruler. Sid halted his horse and watched the three riders racing down the Pass. The frantic bellows of Ruler now told him that the deer had been sighted, and presently Sid got a distant glimpse of him, a tiny gray shape bouncing stiff-legged as he dodged through the desert cactus garden.

“Mule deer all right! Guess we’ll stay out, Blazie,” he told the dog. “There are enough after

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him now to catch him with their bare hands! Let us try for mountain sheep, meanwhile."

He turned the pinto toward the base of the Hornaday Mountains which rose in rugged gray-green masses abruptly from the sand floor of the Pass. Their summits were ridged with rough pinnacles of gray granite. What might be on the other side of those ridges at once intrigued the exploring instincts in the boy. He was rather glad of this chance for a lone investigating hike—with good old Blaze his sole companion!

At the base of the mountain, where rock sloped up steeply from sand, he checked his horse and a joyful exclamation burst from him. An eager whine came from Blaze, as he, too, snuffed in the sand. Here they had discovered a regular mountain sheep runway! The big cloven tracks, like pairs of roll biscuit prints, were plentiful and deeply graven in the sand. They ran both ways, but a vague impulse, coupled with a decided penchant for climbing up and exploring these mountains, led Sid to halt at the first lone track that led off upward from the main game trail. It was now nearly noon, and he knew that the sheep would be high in the mountains at this time of day.

He picketed Pinto out on a patch of grass and

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started up on foot. Helped by Blaze's nose it would not be very hard to follow that track. Where a print lacked in the rocky soil, eager barks from the Airedale now led Sid on. They were climbing fast and furiously before they knew it, the impetuous dog leading Sid up and up the immense craggy slopes. Below him the garden of the Pass rolled out in a great gray plain. A mile down it the faint belling of Ruler told him that the mule deer was still leading them a busy chase. His own sheep tracks were rising toward the ridge in a series of steep bounds, climbing with ease where Sid had to haul himself up or make toilsome detours to avoid formidable white choya bushes. Sid hoped it was a ram. Since the Montana hunt for the Ring-Necked Grizzly he had not shot a single specimen of that king of American game animals, the Big-Horn. A Pinacate head, to match his Montana one, would look mighty well in the Colvin trophy den now located at their new ranch up in the Gila Cañon.

Presently Blaze let out a volleying bray and raced on up the rocks toward the ridge. There came a clatter of rolling stones, and Sid looked up to see a huge ram, followed by two ewes, silhouetted for

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an instant against the blue skyline. Immense curled horns encircled the big sheep's head. For a moment he stopped and looked back, his superb head poised grandly, his horns branching out in regular symmetrical spirals, his white ears standing out like thumbs in front of the horns and his white nose, cleft with the black mouth and nostril lines, a circle of white against his brown neck.

Sid shouted to the dog sharply and raised his rifle, but before he could steady the sights the ram wheeled and was gone like a silent shadow. Blaze yelped and roared out his ferocious challenge, then at Sid's repeated yells he turned and came back whining with impatience. The youth began to feel that Blaze would be a mere nuisance in this sheep hunting because of his lack of experience. Ruler would have circled craftily to head off the Big-Horn and drive him back on the hunter, but Blaze was always for the stern chase and the pitched battle!

Sternly ordering the dog to heel, Sid climbed on up cautiously and reconnoitered through the rocks over the ridge. A shallow arroyo lay between him and the next ridge, and beyond that he saw over the mountain back, beyond a void of purple distance, a

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flat red table of rock, etched sharply by the ragged saw-tooth of the ridge between him and it. Sid glanced curiously at that odd rock formation for an instant, then his eyes swept the hollow below for sight of that band of sheep. Blaze whined and tugged frantically at his collar. He had seen them already, long before Sid's slower eyes could pick them out in that mass of rocks and sparse vegetation below.

“Gorry!—There they go! Steady, Blaze!” he gritted through his clenched teeth and then raised the rifle. The army carbine's sights sought out the game swiftly. Sid had filed a forty-five degree cut on the front sight, so that it showed up as a little white mirror over the flat bar of his rear sight. Cutting the mirror square in two with the rear bar, he found the galloping ram and raised it up to just under the distant shoulder of the Big-Horn.

Sid was just on the point of pressing the trigger—indeed had already felt the first movement of the creep of its bolt action—when a bright, shiny, horizontal flash,—the flash of an arrow—shot across the gray slopes of the ridge opposite! The ram staggered, stumbled, and struggled up a ledge, pawing convulsively with his hoofs. A second and a

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third arrow flash swept across the hillside and stopped in the ram's flank. Sid gasped with astonishment. Those flashes were *arrows!* Then he grabbed Blaze's collar instinctively, put down the rifle hurriedly, and closed his fingers around the dog's muzzle so that he could not bark.

Sid was too nonplussed for a moment to speak. Arrows! It *could* not be Niltci, for the Navaho boy had long since abandoned his bow, now that his white friends kept him in unlimited cartridges. Sid watched the ram in his death struggles, not daring to move so much as his head. Those arrows had been shot by some unknown Indian. These mountains were *inhabited* then. He could see the two ewes tearing wildly down the arroyo toward a grim and scowling lava field that lay far below. They disappeared around a corner of granite, some distance down, but still the Indian who had fired the arrows did not come out of his hiding place.

Who could he be? Sid knew that the Papagoes had long since abandoned this hunting ground. Their tank still remained, filled eternally from season to season with rainfall, the sole reminder of that time when the tribe used to gather here to drive the sheep and antelope into the craters and

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slaughter them wholesale in the trap thus set. Now the Papagoes had become a pastoral people, raising corn, selling baskets, receiving their beef rations from a beneficent government, which, however, kept them virtually prisoners on two small reservations. This Indian arrow-shooter *might* be a wandering Yaqui from Mexico, but that was hardly possible. It would go hard with him if caught on this side of the border by any of our rangers!

Why did he not come out? Sid was sure that it was because he had heard Blaze's bark coming up the mountain, followed by the appearance of those hunted sheep. He was lying low.

For what? To shoot down the hunter the same way that he had laid low the ram? Well, if he had to wait all day, he would not be *that* victim, Sid decided, then and there!

And meanwhile the ram lay a silent, pathetic heap of horns and hoofs, lonely under the hot sun, surrounded by the gray crags and green acacias that had been his home—while the enigma of his death remained still inscrutable. A stunted green saguarro rose near where he had fallen, a marking-post of the desert; the approach below him was guarded by a sturdy choya, to stumble into which would be agony.

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For a long time Sid stood watching the place where the arrows had seemed to come from, undecided what to do next. There was a craggy boulder over there, jutting out from the hillside, and behind it strung out cover in the shape of creosote bushes and rocky fastnesses of jumbled granite. But nothing moved. The unknown Indian still lay hidden, watching that ram carcass, too, like a trap set ready to spring. Sid lowered his head slowly, inch by inch, determined to play this waiting game to a finish himself. His muscles were trembling from holding his fixed poise so long and the under tendon of his right knee ached.

It had never occurred to him that he was in any danger himself—when suddenly a savage growl rumbling in Blaze's throat caused him to turn half way to the right. Instantly came the twang of a bow and the sharp hiss of an arrow. Blaze bawled out in pain, then sprawled out flat, with all four of his fury paws spread out like woolly broom handles, while his pained eyes looked up piteously to Sid. An arrow transfixes him above his shoulders. The dog seemed paralyzed as Sid dropped beside him, hot anger welling up in his heart. A hurt to one's own person does not cause a whiter rage than one

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done to a dumb pet! Sid peered about him, seeking with glittering eye for something to fire at. Beside him Blaze moaned, sighed deeply, and then fell over stiffly, the arrow sticking in the rock and partly supporting him. Sid hesitated to pull it out. To start the blood spurting free now would kill whatever chance he had yet for life—if he were not already gone.

It seemed a most cruel shot, to Sid. *Why* had the Indian spared him and shot his dumb and faithful companion instead? Then he began to glimpse signs of wily red strategy in all this. The unknown enemy intended to capture him *alive* if possible! With Blaze at his side it could not be done by any creeping attack, for the dog's keen nose would immediately detect the near presence of any person whatever.

Sid looked cautiously all about him, finger on trigger and rifle ready. To the south the saw-tooth ridge rose high above him to yet loftier levels. All about him were jagged pinnacles, rough and craggy and full of hollows and rocky points which could not be seen around. To creep back down the mountains, somehow, and then fire three shots for help as soon as possible seemed to him the best plan. He hated to

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abandon Blaze while there was a spark of life left, but would it not be better for them to be separated anyhow, now? The dog might get away if he recovered even if Sid should be captured.

That arrow that had pierced Blaze had come from a rocky lair to the north of their position, just how far away he could not tell. The hiss of it had really been Sid's first warning. Never again could he forget that sharp, ghostly *whew!* Making for a sheltering hollow which would be out of sight of the rocky lair, yet be open enough for him to see around him a short distance, Sid began to crawl down from the ridge. As yet he had hardly moved, but his heart was beating wildly. It seemed to him absolutely hopeless to get away from this mountain with he knew not how many hostile Indians all around him. The very idea that this desolate land was inhabited by even a small tribe seemed weird, uncanny. Not a track save their own had they seen so far. Even the old wagon ruts of the Hornaday expedition had long since been buried in the sands or washed out by the rains. It had been all new country, all virgin. If an Indian band lived here they could not be Papagoes, for the first one missing from the reservation would call out a troop of sol-

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ders after him. Had Vasquez, then, already gotten up from Mexico with some Yaquis?

Sid thought of all possible solutions as he crept warily downhill, pausing before each craggy outcropping in his path before daring to pass it. Then a glimpse of something red which moved behind a bush below to the left caused him to stop and raise his rifle, and, while poised in the tense set of the aim, a sudden, almost noiseless, rush of feet behind him sent electric shocks all through him! There was no time to even lower the rifle and turn around. Subconsciously his leg muscles leapt out wildly. He had an expectant sensation of a knife entering his back—and then a thin band like a strap swept down and across his eyes and something tight gripped around his throat. Knees, and the heavy weight of a man on his back, bore him to earth. His arms sprawled out, dropping the rifle; his tongue shot out and out, gagging fiercely against that awful halter grip around his throat. Sid thought of the Thug strangling cloth in that last instant before an enormous drumming in his head gave way to blackness clouding over his eyes. Then came the heavy thump of the ground striking him, and unconsciousness. . . .

It seemed but a very few minutes, the continuation

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of some terrible dream, when his eyes opened again. He was lying face downward where he had fallen, and his lungs were pumping and sucking air in great draughts, as if recovering from some endless and vague period of suffocation. Blood was trickling down his face and making a little pool on the rock, while a cut or a bruise, he could not say which, over his eyebrows smarted sharply.

Sid made a slight sound and attempted to turn over. Two grunts answered him. Immediately a strange Indian was at his side helping him turn over roughly, and he learned for the first time that his arms were pinioned behind. Sid looked up into the buck's face. It was round, hawklike and stern, with narrow black eyes that had no pity. He recognized the type as Apache instantly. There was none of the stolidity of the Pima and the Papago in that face, nor of the regular-featured, straight-nosed Navaho, like Niltci, who resembled a copper-colored Englishman. This man looked more like some bird of prey, in the Roman hook of his nose and the craggy sternness of his mouth. The first word he uttered as he turned to his young companion confirmed Sid's thought, for it was in the harsh Athapascan dialect of the Apache.

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Between them they yanked the boy to his feet and started up the hill. Nothing further was said. They passed Blaze's niche, the dog still lying on his side, a pathetic furry heap dominated by the arrow, and one of the Apaches pointed and let out a grunt. The other nodded. Evidently they considered him dead. They pushed Sid on down into the arroyo and crossed to where lay the ram. The older man then grunted a few words and at once set about paunching the game. The younger led on with Sid.

As they topped the rise of the next ridge, that same flat red rampart that Sid had noticed while stalking the ram burst on his view. But now it proved to be a really wonderful natural phenomenon. Fire, lava, a tremendous outpouring of the bowels of the earth had been at work here, no doubt during that period when the craters were formed and it had cast up that mighty red wall. Sid wished that Scotty, with his knowledge of geology, were with him now to study out the wonder of this vast red rampart before his eyes. The whole interior angle made by the bend of the mountains had been blown out here by lava explosion, the huge granite strata having been forced up on end like a pair of trap doors, making two enormous red ramparts, vertical-

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sided and running out from the rocky angle of the hills until their outer ends rose like towers. These terminated the red walls, a thousand feet from the ridge to the end of the lower gap where the lava had burst out. At that lower end the ramparts rose at least four hundred feet sheer from the granite slopes, and a great apron of black and scowling lava ran down from there at a steep slope, to lose itself under the sands far below. But the walls were of sheer granite, colored red by the fierce heat of that molten lava of ages ago.

Red Mesa! Red Mesa! Red Mesa!—The certainty of its being the lost mesa kept singing in Sid's ears as they descended. No such geologic formation as this could exist anywhere around Pinacate and not have been discovered before. Those ancient Papagoes who had reported it to Fra Pedro of 1680 no doubt had called it a mesa by reason of its resemblance to the true mesa formation. But, unlike the mesas of the north which are formed by water scouring and erosion, the walls of this one had been cast up bodily by the explosive force of pent-up lava. Still, there was resemblance enough to have given the place its name, Red Mesa, Sid was certain.

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The young Apache kept behind Sid as he prodded him on downward. There was no trail. His savage guide avoided choyas and chose the best possible routes for descent, that was all, while steadily the giant wall of Red Mesa frowned higher and nearer above them. Sid looked up as they approached the base of the west wall. Flat slabs of bare, smooth granite went up at a steep slope for perhaps a hundred feet. Above that the red wall rose sheer to fissured and turreted pinnacles three hundred feet above the top of that awful slope. Inaccessible from anywhere below was Red Mesa!

After more rocky descent they came around the great tower at the lower end. Mighty and majestic, like the belfry of some huge cathedral, it rose out of the depths of the valley. A great smooth slope of black lava, shiny and slippery as glass, formed a slanting apron here, spanning the gap from tower to tower. But what an apron! Like the face of a dam, it spread across from one wall to the other, closing a gap three hundred feet wide and itself at least four hundred feet up to its edge, the towers of the two walls rising for half their height above it still. Geologically it was an imposing instance of the unlimited power of Nature. When that moun-

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tain-side had burst, the whole round world must have shaken like a leaf and all the marine creatures in the great seas to the north have been swept over by a tidal wave of unexampled proportions! The lava had flowed out and downward, cooling slowly until this dam—for a cataract of fire—had formed and remained as a grim witness to the stupendous natural event that had once taken place here.

Sid, the educated white boy, had become so interested in reconstructing the geological aspects of this formation that he almost forgot the irksome tightness of the thongs that still bound his arms and the almost certain death to which he was being led. He knew only too well from border history the ways of the wild Apache! But the Indian guard behind him had no other thought but his duty as jailer. While Sid's wondering eyes were scanning that giant apron of lava that flowed down out of Red Mesa, the Apache suddenly spun him violently around. Sid had one whirling glimpse of a small black opening in the lava above, looking like a ragged mouth, and his curiosity about it had just begun to leap up overthrowing the greater marvel of the whole cataclysm of Red Mesa, when his head was forcibly held from turning and his bandanna was whipped deftly across

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his eyes. The sandy plain below disappeared from view, and in its place was now an impenetrable blackness.

Presently he felt the grip of two firm hands on his elbows. A vigorous push set his feet in motion to hold his balance. By the shortness of his step and the upward lift of it Sid knew they were climbing again. Often the Indian stooped down and took hold of his ankles to guide his footsteps to some secure place. Sid could tell by the opprobrious epithets in Apache with which the young fellow belabored him that he scorned Sid's blind clumsiness and was angry and intolerant, but Sid made no sign that he understood the language. Once, though, he nearly gave himself away, when the buck shouted "Right!" sharply in Apache and Sid instinctively moved his foot over that way, searching for a crevice in the lava.

After a long and slow climb they stopped, and Sid felt the Indian's fingers gripping him strongly around the back of the neck. It was useless to resist. His head was being forced silently down, and the boy submitted wonderingly. Then they went forward, bent over again, and twice he felt the top of his head striking bare and jagged rock above

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which cut painfully. Instantly he thought of that little black mouth in the lava apron that he had caught a mere glimpse of when the Indian was turning him around. They were in that cave now, whatever it was. It was hot and suffocating in here. Sid choked for breath and sneezed as faint sulphur fumes pringed in his nostrils. He had a sense of being urged slowly upward. Now and again the fingers on his neck would press him to earth and he would go forward on hands and knees, where the least attempt to raise his head would result in a painful scratch from the tunnel roof that was evidently above them.

In time a draught of pure air began coming down from somewhere above. Sid could see nothing, yet with the buoyancy of youth he was strangely happy and also consumed with curiosity. They would probably stake him out and build a slow fire on his stomach when he got up out of this tunnel, but while it lasted it was all as exciting as exploring it on his own would have been! More air and purer came to him now. The sulphur fumes disappeared. Something wooden like an upright log ladder struck him on his forehead and the Indian raised him up and called out loudly. Muffled voices answered him from somewhere up above. Then he felt his guard

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stoop and lift him by the legs while invisible hands above reached down and seized him under the arm-pits. He was hauled up the ladder and then he sensed being in some sort of a room—being guided across it.

The indescribable sweetish odor of Indian was strong in here. Sid had been so often in tepees and hogans as to be able to recognize that smell instantly. All the races of man have a distinctive smell of their own, and the aboriginal ones, Malay, black boy, yellow man and red Indian are all agreed that the white man has a smell, too.

“White man smell like sheep!” as a Piute chief had once truthfully put it! The odor of corn meal, burnt feathers, paints and greases told Sid, too, that he was in some sort of medicine lodge. It could not have been a kiva, for the dank smell of damp stone was wanting.

Then a sudden lightening of all the cracks around that bandanna told him that he was in bright sunlight once more. There was the perfume of growing squash and melon and pepper, the faint odor of green beans, the smell of grass—and of water! Red Mesa was really a valley then, inclosed by two giant walls

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and shut off from below by that ancient lava apron! And it was inhabited by a band of Apache!

That much Sid's sense of reasoning had told him before the squeals of children and the cries of squaws and shouts of men came to his ears. People were all around him now, exclaiming in Apache, every word of which he understood. Then the deep voice of some one in authority came toward them and a guttural command to untie him was given. The bandanna was at once whisked from Sid's eyes. He stood for a time blinking in the glare of the sun. High red walls rose up to right and left of him. A large tank of water, almost a pond, filled much of the basin between them, but there were strips of cultivated plants along its borders, too, and here and there he noted a grass Apache hut.

Sid fixed his eyes finally on a tall chief who confronted him. The man's features were round, heavy and forceful, such as we are accustomed to associate with the faces of the captains of industry among our own people. His long, coarse hair fell around his ears, tied about the brows with home-woven red bayeta cloth. A single eagle's feather sticking up from the back told Sid that this man was a rigid disciplinarian of the old school and a formalist in

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the customs of his tribe, for it signified only one coup, such as a far younger man than he would have made in the old days. He wore a white buckskin shirt, with the tails outside coming down nearly to his knees. Long white buckskin leggins that disappeared under the apron of his breech clout told Sid, further, that this chief was a primitive red man, or else had not seen white men for many years.

As Sid's eyes still blinked, getting accustomed to the strong light, a coppery grin cracked the chief's features.

"Well! I'll be—! What have we here!" he exclaimed in excellent English.

Then he turned angrily to the young buck at Sid's side and burst into a storm of guttural Apache invective.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOUL OF THE INDIAN

THAT torrential outburst which raged out from the Apache chief seemed to scorch and wither with shame the young Indian buck who stood beside Sid. The chief was upbraiding him in the most scathing terms in the Apache language, as Sid understood it, for the folly of capturing and bringing here a white man to their stronghold. Sid's own person was safe according to Indian honor so long as he remained in the enemy camp, but what to do with this white man, now that he was here, would be a matter that only the old men could decide in council. As for the youth, whose name Sid learned was Hano, he was being condemned to the direst penalties for his act. The chief finally paused, arms folded across his chest, and eyed the youth sternly, awaiting what reply the culprit could make.

“The white man was spying on us, my father,”

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replied Hano, simply. "It seemed best to take him, lest he get away and tell others."

"Why did ye not follow him, then? If he saw nothing you could have let him go! If he saw—kill and kill quickly!" thundered the angry chief. "Die thou shalt instead!"

The youth hung his head, unable to answer. It disturbed Sid strangely to learn that this boy was indeed the chief's son, and that this Spartan sentence was being passed on him by his own father. He himself would have pardoned Hano, for youth does not think far ahead; it acts mainly on impulse. That he, an enemy, might discover the secret stronghold of an Apache clan and should therefore have been slain or taken seemed to Sid, too, the natural reasoning for Hano to have followed. Sid felt grateful that he had, for some obscure reason, probably the bond of youth itself, spared his life instead.

The chief, however, paid Hano no further attention but turned on Sid those piercing black eyes that seemed to look through and through him.

"Young white man, who are you and what is your business down here?" he demanded sternly.

"My name is Sidney Colvin, son of Colonel Col-

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vin, U. S. Army, retired," answered Sid, facing the chief respectfully.

The Apache's eyes widened for an instant, startled, if such a stoic could be. "Colvin!" he exclaimed.

Then all expression faded from his face. His hand, however, rose, involuntarily to touch a gold ornament that hung pendent from his neck. Sid thought for a moment that a play of memory seemed passing in the black inscrutable depths of his eyes. Under that eagle gaze, though, he himself could not long endure; in sheer embarrassment he dropped his own eyes until they, too, fastened themselves on the ornament. It was a gold twenty dollar piece, pierced with a small hole in its upper rim and hanging from a rude chain of beaten silver. To Sid the curious thing about it was that it was the sole thing of white-man origin about the chief's person.

"And your business?—a prospector, I suppose," said the chief, after another silent scrutinizing interval.

"No, ethnologist," replied Sid quietly.

"Ethnologist!" echoed the chief. An expression of strong disgust crossed his stern face. "These learned fools who misrepresent and misunderstand

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the Indian worse than all other white men!—Pah!"

Sid was more than astonished at this outburst. This Apache had evidently been well educated—once—perhaps at Carlisle. Why, then, had he come here to live with this wild band and become their chief? That could wait; at present he was glad to talk ethnology with this educated Indian, for Sid, too, had felt that disgust over the stupidity and lack of understanding displayed by the average ethnologist's treatise indicated in the chief's tones.

"It's astonishing how much they do misunderstand you," agreed Sid. "Knowing as they should the Indian's fundamental belief that all life, man, animal, and growing tree, has a soul which is the gift of the Great Mystery and returns to Him in the end, how *can* they report your Indian ceremonials as mere spirit worship, devil worship, sun worship—Gad! It makes my blood boil!" Sid spoke vehemently, warming up as his own indignation over the vapid misunderstandings and the utter lack of comprehension of most ethnologists' reports enraged him. "Chief, you know, and I know the Great Mystery! As one of your own great men has said, 'He who may be met alone, face to face, in the shadowy aisles of the forest, on the sunlit bosom

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of the great prairie, upon dizzy spires and pinnacles of naked rock, or yonder in the jeweled vault of the night sky!" Because the Indian is too reverent to speak of Him by name, our worthy ethnologists report that this and that tribe believes in no supreme God, only in spirits—bosh!"

Sid's eyes sparkled with the intensity of his feeling. He forgot for the time that he was a prisoner of a hostile tribe, in a desolate, barren region, far from white habitation. The burning sense of the injustice of even the best of us toward the Indian swept him away. He spoke out his convictions, as ardently as ever he had championed the Indian's soul before those white professors who had come to study them here in the southwest—and had misunderstood.

The Apache's eyes softened at the youth's vehemence. "My son seems to comprehend something of us. It's astonishing—rare, in one of your race! I lived long among the whites—once," he smiled sardonically. "The massacre of my people at Apache Cave, what think you of that?" he asked.

Sid realized that his attitude toward the whole Indian problem was being tested out by this wily chief; that upon his answer depended his life. Yet

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he simply replied out of his own convictions, with no thought of how it might affect his fate.

"A pitiable business, chief!" he answered. "Men, women, children, all shot down to the last one! I suppose it *had* to be, since you would not surrender. The Army had its orders, you know."

"Orders!" The chief drew himself up proudly. "The Apaches *never* surrender, to injustice!" he exclaimed. "I am Honanta, son of that Chief Chuntz who fell in that fight, white man!"

Sid glanced up at him, surprised. "I always understood that not one Apache escaped alive from that cave——" he began, wonderingly.

"No! Let me tell you. There was *one* humane officer among the white soldiers who entered that cave of death, after all was over. He came upon my mother, lying among the heaps of slain. She still lived, shot in three places. She held me, an infant, protectingly hid in her arms. A soldier raised his gun to end her life—a wounded squaw would be a mere nuisance, you know!"—the chief interjected with bitter sarcasm—"but that officer struck up his rifle. He had them take my mother to the ambulances. And, out of the kindness of his

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heart, that she might not die of starvation, he gave her—this."

Honanta raised his hand again to the gold piece.

A curious sensation of excitement went through and through Sid. His own father, Colonel Colvin, had been a young second lieutenant of cavalry in that fatal fight of Apache Cave. But he had never mentioned the squaw who had survived, nor the twenty-dollar gold piece; in fact he had always been most reticent about that battle, regarding the whole subject with the most extreme distaste. Sid felt that even if Colonel Colvin *were* that humane officer, to attempt to establish his own relationship with him and so gain immunity would be regarded by this crafty chief as mere opportunism.

"The officer's name, did she ever learn it?" he contented himself with asking.

The chief smiled enigmatically. "My son," said he gently, "to-morrow I shall be able to give that Sun Dance that I vowed to the Great Mystery forty years ago. Is—is your father still living?"

"Yes," said Sid. "He has a new ranch up in the Gila Cañon country. We came west again, after I settled down to work with your people. The lure of Arizona was always very strong with father.

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Here was the scene of his early active days; here, in that grand mountain region, he wants to live until his time comes. It's a great country!"

"Once more, then, before I die, I must leave the Arms of the Great Mystery!" mused Honanta, more to himself than to Sid. Then his whole manner toward the youth changed and he motioned him courteously toward his large grass lodge.

"The Arms of the Great Mystery!" So that was what they called Red Mesa! thought Sid as they walked toward the lodge. Truly, like great protecting arms, those mighty red ramparts rose on each side of this little valley, shielding this lost band of Apache forever against further encroachment. As to the chief's remark about giving a Sun Dance, it seemed to Sid that he himself appeared to be a vital and necessary part of it. Whether he would be a sacrifice in it or what part he would be called to play in it was a mystery to him. To-morrow he would know, though!

Sid entered the lodge with Honanta, Hano following submissively. He looked about him curiously at the giant hoops of ironwood overhead which formed its arches, at the dense thatch of galleta grass bundles which kept out rain and sun alike. There

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was little furniture. A red olla, sweating cool water on its porous surface, stood on a three-pronged fork in a corner. A gourd dipper hung beside it and at a motion from the chief Sid drank. There were bundles of cane-and-ironwood arrows which Sid noted were curiously tipped with native copper heads. There were bows strongly backed with bone; parfleche skins for storing dried meat and berries; baskets holding shelled corn. From the rafters hung strings of red peppers and dried corn ears, and loops of dried squash. Shallow baskets held red beans, specked with white dots.

Sid sat down on a roll of skins. Hano, who had entered with them, still remained standing. He seemed to be waiting for something, and Sid noted that the chief had not yet ordered him to be seized and bound. After a time, while the chief was apparently thinking over some further questions, an interruption came—the sound of a woman's voice crooning softly. She entered the lodge, beautiful as the night. She was clad in soft white buckskin, long-fringed, heavily beaded, and in her arms she bore a tiny bundle from which came soft infantile noises.

Hano's bronzed face was working in agony of

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feeling as she entered. Sid and the chief rose respectfully.

"One boon, my father!" burst out Hano hoarsely as the girl hesitated before them, the soft smile of motherhood on her face.

"Which is?" queried the chief turning upon him sternly.

"To perform the whispering ceremony for my newborn son—before I die," begged Hano brokenly.

Sid's heart gripped him as he watched the tiny bundle being passed across into the young father's arms. He hugged his baby close; then pressed his mouth to the little ear that he uncovered. Sid knew that he was whispering the name of the Great Mystery into his son's ear, the very first word of the human voice that the newborn Indian babe hears. It was an old, old ritual of ancient Indian custom.

Then: "Farewell, little one!" he heard Hano's anguished tones murmur as he passed the child over to its mother. The girl started back and looked at him astounded, then at Sid, and finally she turned to the chief, her eyes dark pools of questioning.

"It must be, my daughter," said Honanta. "My son has erred grievously. It is for the old men to decide."

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He blew on a bone battle-whistle which dangled along his thigh like a quirt. At the signal two warriors appeared.

“Take him to the medicine lodge! Bind!” ordered Honanta. He turned his back on Hano and covered his face. A suppressed, hurt sound, like some dumb animal mortally wounded, came from the girl and Sid felt his throat choking. Hano turned once more as they led him away.

“Farewell, Nahla!” his voice rang. “Bring my little son to the stake, that he may see how a warrior can die.”

For a long time there was a dead silence in the lodge. Sid glanced from time to time at the stoical, impassive face of the chief; then at the young wife, who sat huddled in the rounded end of the lodge, her newborn child in her arms and silent tears coursing down her cheeks.

Grief had stricken this lodge—and all because of him. Indian justice was stern, inexorable; on the same exalted plane as its religious conceptions, its four cornerstones of Indian morality — Truth, Honor, Courage, Chastity. For sparing him Hano was to be punished. Was he, too, doomed to take some awful part in to-morrow’s Sun Dance?

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Sid knew vaguely of the Sun Dance. In present days it has degenerated among the Plains tribes into a brutal material thing, a degrading exhibition of suffering and endurance of no spiritual meaning whatever. But in the olden times it had been a thank-offering to the Great Mystery, vowed to Him in memory of some special deliverance from peril or certain death. But for the beneficent intervention of the Great Mystery the man had lost his life; therefore all the original symbolism of the Sun Dance was of a potential death and a resurrection by the grace of the Great Mystery. But why should Honanta give this Sun Dance at this late date, forty years after the massacre at Apache Cave? Because some evidence of Honanta's physical deliverer had come to light, Sid reasoned. That, too, was necessary for the full ceremony to be performed. If Honanta knew that that humane white officer's name was Colvin, his own part in the ceremony was obvious. What then of Hano? Could he be destined for some heartrending sacrifice on Honanta's part? It was possible! Sid decided to rescue him, to get him out of Red Mesa and send him to Big John for help, if he would go. He planned, now, to find out

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where the medicine lodge was and then act when the time was ripe.

Its location was shown him in the most unexpected manner.

“She was a wonderful woman—my mother!” exclaimed Honanta suddenly, breaking his reverie and apparently continuing his narrative as if no interruption had occurred. “She escaped with me from that ambulance by night, for she had no wish to be brought a captive to the reservation that was then being allotted to my people. In the mountains we lived, together. She built a hut of sweet grass. She recovered from her wounds, healing them with plants taught my people by the Great Mystery. She fished and hunted like a man, carrying me always with her on her back. She taught me to love and respect the birds, who live very close to the Great Mystery. As I grew up, she taught me to know the animals, our brothers; to sing chants for their souls when I had to kill them for our needs. She taught me to reverence the bears, who are our mother clan by the First Man. Silence, love, reverence—these were my first lessons in life. Through her I learned to know the Great Mystery. To pray daily to Him after the morning bath, silently, with

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arms outstretched facing the sun, which is the most sublime of His creations. To seek Him on the high places, alone. To see Him at night, through the glory of the stars."

Sid listened, waiting respectfully while the chief paused again, sunk in reverie. As an ethnologist he was learning the true inwardness of the Indian's soul from a red man's own lips. For some reason Honanta seemed to have laid hold upon his sympathy and he now poured it all out as to the first white man who really comprehended the fundamentals of that marvelous Indian creed now lost to mankind forever.

"As I grew up, our broken-hearted people turned to Christianity. It seemed to us the only thing the white man had which promised mercy and hope," went on the chief. "I went to a mission school. I learned of Jesus—a man after our own heart! I read the Bible, which, please remember, was written by men of my race, by men of the East—by no one of your blue-eyed, conquering people who now dominate the earth. I saw the white men preaching the Bible with their lips, but their lust for money and power, their eternal buying and selling was always there. I saw that their lives flouted the Bible

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at every step. I became disgusted. I knew that the teachings of Jesus and our own ancient religion were essentially the same. We used to *live* those teachings, too, long before the white man came. So I determined to return to our ancient faiths and customs. When I became a man I wandered in all desolate regions, seeking a spot where the white man was not. And I found it. Here, in this forgotten and inaccessible stronghold, which I named 'The Arms of the Great Mystery,' for they protect us forever. Here I brought my mother, and as many of her clan as I could find. One by one, they escaped from the reservation and joined me here. These are all that are left of the great Yellow Bear clan of the Apache."

Again came a silence. Sid felt strangely moved. He was torn between his duty to Scotty, his friend, and his new sympathies for this hunted band of a once free people in this their last refuge. For those copper arrowheads had told him that there *was* metal here; that Red Mesa really had a mine, as was reported by the Papagoes. His friendship for Scotty prompted him to find this mine and tell him its location once he should escape. Yet, to destroy the peace of this last band of the original red children

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of our country, to give over their last stronghold to the lust and greed of the white miners who would surely come here—could he do it, even for Scotty's sake?

"And here my mother died, full of years and honor," went on the chief. "Come; I will show you!" He led the way out of the lodge. Along the borders of the deep, blue-green waters of the tank a path led to the substantial brush shelter built up in the interior juncture of the two high red walls. Every pole and stick of it had evidently been brought up from the surrounding desert, for no trees grew here, all the available soil having been given over to cultivation. Inside the house Sid saw all the ceremonial objects of the old-time Indian mystery dances, marriage basket trays in intricate designs of black, white, and red on the willow, baptismal bottle baskets made watertight by piñon gum, medicine bundles filled with healing herbs. And, in one particularly sacred shrine, the chief showed him a row of small bundles which Sid knew at once were mortuary relics. They contained the hair and perhaps a few mystic possessions of the dead of the tribe. The first bundle of these was heavily decorated, as if all the women of the band had lavished

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their art and symbolism in bead work upon it in loving memory.

“My mother’s!” boomed the chief’s deep voice, laying his hand on it.

Sid removed his sombrero and looked reverently. After a time he let his eyes wander around the dim recesses of the room. The chief remained standing, lost in reverie before the reliquary bundle of his mother, but Sid’s eyes searched for and finally found Hano, seated bound against a post in a dim corner under the rocky walls between whose fork the medicine lodge had been built. That there was a concealed opening in this rock somewhere near which led to the cave tunnel up which he had come the youth was sure. He examined the place keenly for an instant, and then turned and stood awaiting the chief’s further pleasure.

“My white son is interested in the ethnology of our poor people? Why, then, does he come down here, around Pinacate, where there *are* no Indians?” asked the chief as they went out the door.

That was a knock-down poser for Sid to answer without time to think it over! How could he disclose the real object of their trip—mining, the seeking of this very Red Mesa mine? Yet he could

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not plead ethnology as the purpose of *this* trip! To lie, to evade, would be impossible before those keen eyes that read truth unerringly. To lie and be caught in his own trap by the wily chief would mean death, under the ancient Indian customs under which this band lived. A murderer, with them, might be pardoned, if he could show sufficient cause, but a liar was always summarily dealt with, for no one in the tribe felt safe with him who spoke with a forked tongue.

"I have a friend," answered Sid, after a pause in which Honanta stood with his eyes searching his to their depths, "I came with him. His reason for visiting Pinacate is not mine to tell you."

The chief smiled slightly. "It is good. Friendship of man for man is our highest test of character. He who betrays a friend, even under torture, is unworthy. How many of you are there?"

"Four," said Sid. "One cowman guide, the white boy who is my friend, a Navaho youth and myself."

The chief looked relieved. Evidently he did not consider those three out there somewhere in the desert particularly formidable, nor that they could easily find Sid.

"Go, my young brother! You are free of our

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village. You cannot leave it, for the entrance is well guarded. We shall wait until my old men have spoken."

Honanta turned and stalked back to his lodge, leaving Sid free to wander at will. The youth at first regretted that he had not told the whole truth about his party, that he had neglected to mention the most important member of it—the dog, Ruler, who would surely track him here just as soon as Big John and Scotty started back to look for him. They would arrive at Red Mesa to-morrow morning, and, guard or no guard, Ruler would lead them to that cave mouth! There was no doubt of his own rescue. But it might mean a fight, might mean anything once Big John arrived on the scene! And for Scotty, with his acute mineralogical knowledge, to get one sight of Red Mesa would mean the end of the Yellow Bear clan's peaceful days. There were two things for him to do now, Sid decided; to free Hano, and to escape himself—after which he could think out what further steps to take.

Left to himself, Sid strolled around the pond under the high walls of Red Mesa. He looked curiously at the small patches of maize, growing in clumps very much as the Hopi plant them; at the

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borders of beans and peppers; at squash plants that ran riot up the stone walls, growing out of small crevices of soil in the rock. Every inch of soil was being cultivated. As it was the dry season, great woolly clouds of lavender and rose, empty of rain, were flying across high over the red ramparts in the blue sky. A few squaws were irrigating the higher plants, carrying up large jugs of water from the pond.

A little further on he came to a deep gorge, cleft in the high rock, and Sid stopped, his heart beating swiftly. Here was the mine described on that Red Mesa plaque! It ran like a fissure through the granite, a wide seam of black lava trap, and with it was a vein of rich, dark ore. Pure copper smelted out by the heat of the lava glinted a dull black throughout the vein, and a still intenser black, gleaming with points of white, told of native silver nuggets mixed with the copper. It was a big lode. It swept downward, passed under the dirt path under Cid's feet and descended into the dim blue depths of the tank. Here was Scotty's mine, all right!

In it two Apache were working now, making arrow points at a primitive forge up in the shadows

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of the cleft, blowing a welding heat on a small pot fire with a bellows made of the skins and horns of the mountain sheep. They looked at Sid curiously and one grunted an exclamation in Apache at the other, but neither spoke to him.

Then there was a commotion in the village. A hunter's song came deep and resonant, from the depths of the medicine lodge. Presently there emerged two stalwart bucks, bearing the carcass of the ram that Sid had seen shot before his eyes that morning. The three arrows that still stuck in his side identified him for Sid. In addition its body was now gayly decorated with prayer sticks and symbolic feathers signifying thankful remembrance to the Great Mystery who had given them this food. All the village turned out rejoicing at the hunters' song. From the grass huts came squealing children, laughing girls, and lithe young men, all sunburned black as negroes which gave Sid the idea that most of them had been born here. The procession came shouting and rejoicing along the path bordering the pond and then all followed the ram's carcass into a large lodge down near the open lower end of the valley where evidently the old men of the council

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were to make the appropriate prayer—"Spirit, partake!" the Indian grace—over the game before dividing it among the band.

Sid watched them depart. It seemed to him that a good time to act had now come. Honanta had not appeared. He was evidently in his lodge or else in a vapor bath hut near the pond preparing himself for his Sun Dance. One of the squaws had left her water jug standing by the brink of the tank, and it gave Sid the solution of a problem that had been troubling him for some time. He shouldered it and then walked swiftly toward the medicine lodge. There was no doubt now that the opening to the cave tunnel came out there, for out of it had just been brought the slain mountain sheep. He got to its door unperceived by any one and walked swiftly to the rear recess, his eyes rapidly accustoming themselves to the gloom within.

"Hano!—Shall I free you?" he asked in Apache, as he groped his way to where the young buck sat bound.

The Indian youth stared. If surprised at Sid's speaking his own tongue, he gave no sign. Then he shook his head.

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"No: I await my father's judgment," he replied proudly. "An Apache does not run away."

"But listen, Hano," said Sid, earnestly, "my people will surely come! They have a hound dog who can track me here. They will be very angry and there will be a fight. You are few, and my people are armed with revolvers and repeating rifles. There will be many killed, and all for nothing. But you can get by the guard down below. I cannot, without a fight and perhaps killing one of your people. You must go. My horse is tethered over at the foot of the mountain. Give him this water jar for me; he must be crazy with thirst by now. Then ride until you find my people. There are three; a big cowman, a boy like me, and a young Navaho. I think they are at Papago Tanks. Tell them that there is peace, and to come quickly."

A long wait ensued while Hano considered.

"Besides, Hano—Mexicans are coming. We'll need white men with rifles if your home is to be defended," urged Sid, playing his last card.

"My brother speaks wise words," said Hano at length. "Cut, white boy!—I go!"

Without waiting a moment more Sid drew his hunting knife and freed the young Apache. Then

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with a delicacy that forbade him to take any advantage of Hano's escape to find the tunnel entrance, he turned his back and waited. There was a faint rustling; then he turned around to find Hano and the water jar vanished from the lodge.

CHAPTER VII

BLAZE

IT was perhaps an hour after Sid and his Apache captors had gone by that Blaze finally came to. The dog moaned feebly; then he tried to rise to his feet. An aching, burning pain shot through his shoulders and there came a sharp twinge as the arrow jerked loose from where its point had stuck in the rock.

It galvanized Blaze to frenzied action. He could not know that that arrow, passing through just above the spinal vertebræ, had temporarily paralyzed him with the shock of its blow. All his doggy understanding realized was that this awful thing burnt like a fire and must be shaken loose at once. At first he thrashed about recklessly trying to break it off or get rid of it, somehow, if rolling and plunging could do it. Then he snapped at the arrow ends savagely, shearing off point and feathers like the ends of a straw.

This spasm of frenzy ended in a mad bolt down

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the mountain in search of Master. Big John was Blaze's idol; the one human who knew everything and always gave him the most glorious times of his life. When hurt before, it had been always Big John, his man-partner of their hunts who, strong and tender, had somehow made his hurts come well. Sid, as Little Master was all right, but Blaze hardly gave him a thought now, for this trouble was too terrible and he *must* find Big John! Trembling all over and yelping every time the arrow stub struck against a passing bush, Blaze struggled on down the hill. The bone tops of his shoulder blades rubbed against this inexorable Thing that stuck tenaciously through the flesh above them and at every step they hurt worse than grinding a raw bone. Again and again he felt himself growing weak and giddy with the pain of it. Each stumble was to him an agony of roaring and helpless rage. Heroic, stoical old Blaze, who had fought bear and mountain lion times innumerable; been bitten, slashed, mauled with clawed paws; who had lost one ear in a fight with a timber wolf—he found this thing to be the most maddening of all his experiences with pain. You could not fight back nor get hold of it, after that first savage crunch of his jaws had bitten off all the arrow

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that could be reached. It rode him thereafter like a spur that never let up.

Blaze's progress grew slower and slower. At times he would stop and howl dismally for some one to come and help him. Then, after a grim and expectant period of waiting, he would crawl on again, floundering and tumbling down the steep flanks of the mountain. In time he reached the plain, where they had started up after the ram. Here was Sid's pinto, and the animal whinnied eagerly for he was already thirsty and weary of waiting for their return. Blaze's nose led him back to the tracks of the main party, where the familiar scent of Big John's white mustang at last smote his nostrils.

It put new heart into the dog. Master's horse! Now we were getting somewhere! He trotted on, enduring the pain in his shoulders stoically until it faded to a general dull ache. Nothing brushed the arrow stub, now. You went carefully around bushes and kept to the mustang's trail, avoiding all thorns and cats-claws. Several miles further on he came to where the buck had been shot and butchered. The bones and pieces of raw meat left behind smelt good, but Blaze was feverish and would not eat.

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His doggy instincts told him to starve out that fever. What lashed him most terribly now was the scourge of thirst. He had lost a good deal of blood, although the arrow had cut nothing vital. Water! He *must* have it!

Big John and Scotty had ridden on toward Papago Tanks with the buck on saddle after the kill. They had not waited for Sid, for it was their custom when any one went off lone hunting not to expect him back before nightfall. Blaze followed on after the white mustang's tracks, sore and weary, his tongue hanging out with thirst and a high fever raging in him. Oh, to find Master! *He* would know! He would get him a canteen or something! To drink and drink and drink! To have cool strong hands draw out this burning pain that seared his shoulders like a hot iron! Only the indomitable courage of his breed kept him up. Blaze was a thoroughbred. He did not know what a streak of cur blood was! Kootenai Firebrand, Culbertson Rex, Champion Swiveller, all famous lion dogs of the West, were among his forebears and they would not let him give up. He staggered on, his feet wobbling crazily under him as the trail wound on southward through a country of black lava cones

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all around him, with vitrified and scoriated lava under foot.

Then Blaze stopped, for the horses had halted here. He looked wearily up toward a huge cone that rose to the east of him. Up that way these tracks led, and he must follow, too!

He arrived at the top, at last, and then gave a feeble yelp of joy. Here Master had got down off his horse, and the smell of him was sweet in Blaze's nostrils! Below him stretched out a vast amphitheater, the sandy floor of a deep crater that was half a mile across. Through a gap in the opposite side the desert vegetation had come marching in, species by species, saguaro, bisanga, choya, creosote bush, to spread out on that wide floor three hundred feet below and cover it with green dots of vegetation. Blaze looked down, his doggy heart sinking with misgivings, for no one was down there. Could he *ever* muster up the strength to climb down into this thing? And where had Master come up out of it again? Only one set of tracks led down here and the descent was as steep as a chimney.

A wild, fresh odor decided him to attempt it. At his feet he snuffed hoof tracks, small, pointed, with musky dew claws—a deer of some kind, Blaze de-

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cided. He did not know that they were antelope, for the smell was new to him, but at once the old hunting ardor surged up in his soul, overriding weariness and physical pain. He attempted a valiant bark, which sounded somehow hoarse and dry in his throat; then he plunged down the steep declivity after the horses. Around him rose high rim rock, red and purple and black. These two lava gaps were the only places where the crater could be entered at all. They all had gone down here; that was reassuring. Here, too, were Ruler's tracks, that four-footed companion whom Blaze secretly envied for his marvelous nose and openly despised for his absurd caution in attacking bear and lion. Here also was the smell of Indian, where Niltci had jumped off and led his mustang down by the bridle. And here Master and the other Young Master had dismounted and climbed down, side by side, their horses following most unwillingly as their sliding tracks showed.

On the crater floor the party had separated and there had been gallopings about in every direction. Blaze followed the white mustang, for she bore Master, his beloved. Soon he came upon a long smoky cartridge from the old .35 meat gun, and the mustang's tracks veered sharply over to the right. The

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smell of fresh blood came to Blaze's nose and he wabbled slowly out to the center of that vast volcanic pit following the scent. A pile of entrails, shank bones, blood dried up by the thirsty sands—that was all, for him, of the antelope that had been shot here!

Blaze lay down, completely tuckered out. Without at least a drink of life-giving water he could not go a step further. The assembling and galloping tracks that led off up to that other gap told which way they had gone out. He could *never* make that ascent, now! Instinct told him to wait until sundown, for it was hot and sultry down here now and there was not a breath of air. He lay down, panting, consumed with thirst. When he tried, later, to rise again he found that his wound had stiffened and the whole top of his shoulders seemed one raw, immovable lump.

He looked about him piteously, then raised his muzzle to the sky in a howl of dismay. Silence, of the brooding desert; and then an answer—the wild howl of a coyote! Blaze's quick eye singled him out sitting up there in the gap, watching him wolf-like. His answering howl had not been of sympa-

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thy or anything like that, but to call other coyotes to help him prepare for this feast of dog flesh!

The danger stiffened Blaze up and strengthened his moral fiber. A savage challenge rumbled in his throat as he rose stiffly to his feet and faced the coyote menacingly. Then a whine of pain came from him. He could not fight, now; but he would not howl again for help, at any rate! That signal was too well understood by these wild dogs that *had* no master!

Blaze looked up at the coyote and then around him again. Should he climb up there and fight this fellow, anyhow, weak as he was, before any more of them came? He could never do it without, first, water! Then his eye fell on a small round brown object lying near by on the sand. He walked stiffly over to it and snuffed it. That thing was what his men drank water out of! It smelt of the young master, too! Scotty had forgotten his canteen during the butchering of that antelope and left it behind, but all Blaze knew about it was that the thing smelt of him and held water. He rolled it over with his paw. An enticing splash came from inside. Instantly all that pent-up thirst torture burst out of him in a frantic effort to get at the

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water inside. He took the canvas case in his teeth and worried and shook it savagely. Of no avail! The cork held tight, and the thing dropped on the sand, the water inside tinkling maddeningly. Blaze stopped a moment to consider. This thing was something like a bone, really! It *had* a bone, of a kind, its spout, sticking out one side. He lay down, with his paws on the body of the canteen, and then began to chew and gnaw fiercely at the cork and tin of the nozzle.

An Airedale's jaws are the most formidable part of him. Those inch-long tushes can give a frightful slash, and with them two of the big 60-pound western Airedales can pull down a mountain lion between them. Blaze's teeth closed on that canteen nozzle like crushing paper. The metal gave; the cork squeezed. A savage pull on it, a shake that would take the ear off another dog, wrenched it loose and broke away the solder in its joint. A thin stream of water began to trickle out through this crack as the canteen lay on the sand—and under it ran a long red tongue, curved like a spoon, lapping up greedily every drop as it flowed out!

After that Blaze felt better. He lay down awhile. The matted cake of dried blood and hair around the

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arrow kept any flow from starting again, even with fresh water making new blood in his veins. It was getting cooler now. A huge circle of shadow began rapidly to creep out from the west toward the center of the crater. The coyote had moved down a hundred yards nearer. Another was singing his shrill song up on the rim, and working around stealthily to join the first one in the gap.

Blaze got up, growling. He was very stiff and could only move those shoulders by enduring intense pain, but immediate attack was his best defense now, and he knew it. Steadily he climbed up the gap through the river of desert vegetation that flowed down its slope. The coyote was waiting for him, silent, crouched for a spring. His green oblique eyes glared at Blaze menacingly, as he drew near—his teeth were bared in a wicked snarl.

Blaze increased his speed, heading straight for him, snarling savagely. The coyote was a little larger than he, but Blaze and Ruler had tackled the great timber wolf together, and he was not in the least afraid of him! At ten paces off he suddenly let out a volley of ferocious terrier barks, vengeful with the fury of the lion, terrifying to the creature attacked. Then he charged.

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That coyote did not wait! That savage attack, even by a wounded dog, was too much for his cowardly nature! There was a squeal, a yelp, a bawl of pain as Blaze's fangs laid open his shoulder to the bone—and then a gray streak vanished through the creosotes so fast that nothing but a greyhound could have overtaken him!

Blaze loped on, grim, dogged, determined. The sun was setting now, and travel would be more durable. Scotty's canteen had given him new life. He was going to win through to camp if he had to bring in every coyote in the desert after him! The trail wound down around the flanks of the crater and brought him back to the sands again. From there it went on, mile after mile, while a grand and beetling mountain range loomed up nearer and nearer.

Blaze felt himself growing weaker again. The sand had given way to the most awful of broken black lava under foot, rough and sharp beyond description. The horses had picked their way over it with difficulty; to the weak and wounded dog it was a purgatory of toil and it took every last ounce of strength out of him.

Darkness fell. Blaze could see fairly well in the

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dark, and he needed to, here! Thorny ocatillas, devilish choyas and stunted bisangas that were balls of sharp thorns outside, had to be seen and avoided if he would save his eyes. Twice he lay down and gave it all up. Only the steadily freshening scent of the white mustang's tracks gave him courage to rise again and keep on.

Then great walls of ragged black rock loomed up, dark and forbidding, ahead in the gloom. It seemed the end of all things to Blaze. What in all the world was he coming to! He stopped, shivering all over with the sharp cold of the desert night. His wound ached unbearably. He lay down puzzled, wearied at the mere sight of this hideous black rocky mass ahead. It was perhaps the tenth time since leaving the crater that he had done so. Blaze groaned and gave up the pursuit of Master in a final disconsolate howl.

But this time the barking challenge of *another dog* answered, sounding faintly in his ears!

Blaze raised his head. Ruler! He knew the hound's voice well! He got up, yelped a hoarse, throaty cry and crawled on. Ruler's challenge grew more and more menacing and then there came the sound of men's voices. And then Master's voice,

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ringing out, stern and vibrant: "Halt, thar! Is that you, Sid?" it asked.

Blaze gave a joyful little moan and crawled feebly into camp, licking humbly at Big John's boots. Ruler, puzzled, snuffed over him, after trying an abortive attempt at a romp. Then the water-hunger became too strong for Blaze to endure longer and he crept on to where a tank glimmered under the stars, a rock-bound pool in the lava, and there he drank and drank and drank until his dry tongue could lap up no more.

"Stand back, fellers! Fotch hyar a light. No, Sid!—and somethin's happened to Blazie boy," called out Big John's voice in the dark. Niltci stirred up the camp fire, and presently Scotty came out of the boys' green wall tent bearing a candle lantern.

"Well, I'll be plumb teetotally *hornswoogled!*" roared Big John, as the light fell on the back of the drinking Blaze. "Shore, he's all bloody! An' he's got a stick through his neck— Come hyar, Niltci! We gotta see about this! Sid's shore got hisself into trouble—dern his pesky hide!"

Niltci made his peculiar exclamatory noise and sprang over to where Blaze still lay drinking.

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“Arrow!” he pronounced after a moment’s inspection.

“Well, I’ll be durned!” grunted Big John. “Shore of it, Injun?” he questioned incredulously.

Niltci nodded. Then, stooping and holding Blaze’s muzzle with his fingers, he gave a quick yank which drew out the shaft. Blaze groaned through his set teeth. His blood came in a stream and they were busy for a short time getting a bandage on it. Then the Indian picked up the arrow and examined it more closely.

“Apache!” he declared.

“No!” roared Big John. “*Cayn’t* be, Niltci! They ain’t an Apache between hyar and the White River country. I’m a gosh-durned fool, I am, an’ proud of it—I’ve lost one of them ornery boys, an’ some one has shot my dawg—but ye cayn’t hand me that Apache stuff, nohow!”

“Apache!” reiterated Niltci, with more emphasis. He pointed to the blood grooves on the shaft in confirmation. All tribes make them in their own peculiar spiral lines.

“What in the world’s happened to Sid, then, John?” queried Scotty, his awed, scared face appearing in the circle of light.

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“Search me, hombre!” grunted Big John. “You Blaze, ef you could only talk, now! But fellers, we gotto set down a-piece and figger this all out the best we kin. Sid ain’t back, but Blaze is; and with an arrer into him. What does it all mean? I *told* you I was a fool!” he vociferated.

“Ruler’s the answer, John,” said Scotty, as they all went back to the camp fire carrying Blaze between them. “We’ll put him on the back trail right off and then we’ll know something.”

“Good haid, li’l man!” agreed Big John. “I’d do it, to-night, only we jist cayn’t work them hosses over that lava in the dark.”

“Well, *I’m* going to, now!—on foot, too!” said Scotty truculently, his Scotch dander rising. “It’s only about three miles back to the crater where we shot the antelope and I left my canteen. We’ll walk. Suppose Sid followed our trail there and got ambushed by some wandering Yaquis? You know how they hate the Mexicans. All whites look alike to them.”

“Apache!” grunted Niltci stolidly.

“All right; Apache, then!” conceded Scotty. “Sid’s in trouble with Indians somehow, and Blaze managed to get away and get here, with that arrow

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in him. Niltci can stay here and look after him and the horses. As for me, I can't get back any too quick!" declared Scotty, with the vibrant sympathy of youth in his tones. "Here, Ruler!"

"Hol' on thar, Scotty! Yore fixin' to miss three bull's-eyes in a row, thar, son. Of co'se I'm goin', ef you are; so we'll sorter git organized, fust. Whar's that ruck sack? We-all mought be gone three days, an' Sid he'll mebbe want medicines an' bandages. By rights I ought to take Niltci and leave you hyar, Scotty, seein' as this is Injun doin's."

But Scotty was obdurate. Start he would, that night, and, as some one had to stay with Blaze and the horses, he insisted on it being Niltci. That didn't suit Big John, for in a raw iron land like this the Indian boy was worth a dozen Scottys to him. The row gathered way, but you might as well argue with one of the lava boulders around Papago Tanks as try to convince a Scotchman!

"Wall, s'pose you and Niltci do this-yer pasear, then? An' I'll stay," said Big John, testily, by way of settling it. "Mind you don't go further'n that crater, though, an' then come back an' report."

There being no further objections, Niltci and

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Scotty soon set off into the night, leading Ruler on a slip leash. Overhead swung the brilliant stars of an Arizona night, a glory of soft light in which crater cones, rugged lava pressure ridges and stunted saguarros sticking up out of the rocks showed dimly. Behind them the grand range of Pinacate rose gloomy and majestic, the eternal cloud of sulphur vapor around its summit blotting out a whole section of the star canopy to the south. Niltci led on noiselessly, picking his way by eyesight that was as good as a cat's in the dark. They passed white smoke trees, ghostly as clouds, in the darkness, growing in company with white brittle bushes out of dry crannies in the lava that could hardly support a cactus.

An hour later they were toiling up the steeps of the crater once more. So far, not even a whine of discovery had come from Ruler. Big John had given them the hobbles of Sid's pinto, to show the scent to the dog when the right time came to try to make him understand what was wanted. But Niltci himself knew the pinto's tracks by some obscure difference in the hoof-mark, and he assured Scotty that so far not a sign of Sid's horse had they come upon.

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"He may have come down into the crater from the other gap, though," objected Scotty; "we'll go down and get my canteen, anyhow."

They climbed down into the vast coliseum of the crater. It was dark as a well down there, and Niltci crept along on all fours, following the pony tracks. He pointed out Blaze's paw prints as they went. The dog had been here, too, following their party of the afternoon. After a time Scotty gave a yelp of discovery and pounced on a round brown object lying on the sand.

"Here's my canteen, anyhow!" he crowed. "I left it here after we butchered the antelope."

Then a cry of surprise came from him as he stopped dead and held out the canteen to Niltci to examine. It was empty of water and the crooked angle of the spout showed that it had been cracked open. "It was more than half full this afternoon, I'm sure of that!" insisted Scotty, excitedly. "Some one's been here beside us—but why did he not uncork it, then?"

Niltci looked it over keenly.

"Dog! Blaze do it. Him chew canteen. Him have come a long way," was his verdict.

He showed Scotty the dog's tooth-marks and then

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replaced the canteen where Scotty had picked it up. There the whole story written in the sand was clear. Here Blaze, wild with thirst, had lain down with the canteen under his paws and chewed at it until he had worried the spout solder loose.

“Dog heap thirsty! Got arrow back in mountains, me think,” declared Niltci.

“Back in the Pass? You’re right! That’s about five miles from here. I’m game to walk it and find out something. First, though, Niltci, we’ll climb up the other gap and trace Blaze out of it. He didn’t come out by the east gap, that’s sure. Sid may have been hunting in some crater to the east of us.”

They started up that long slope down which flowed the river of desert vegetation. Their own tracks of the afternoon were here, and Blaze’s, too. The certainty that he had simply followed them out that way and then turned to the south became stronger as they climbed up. It was settled as sure at the summit of the gap, where Blaze’s paw prints showed that he had made the turn around the crater just as they had.

Scotty and Niltci stood side by side, holding in Ruler who was whining eagerly now, crazy to go

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chasing the coyotes which were howling in the desert all around them. The blood-and-scent story of that one which Blaze had routed when he had attempted to bar his path had excited Ruler, and he had got into his doggy mind the idea that coyote was to be the night's game. Otherwise this whole proceeding was still a mystery to him!

Around them under the stars brooded a black and silent land, dead as the surface of the moon, the wide, flat and parched plain of the lava fields stretching away for fifteen miles to the east. Near by rose the jagged edges of the Rainbow Range, ragged saw-teeth which would be red and purple in the daytime. Now that range was barely distinguishable under the faint light of the stars.

But, as they looked, suddenly a tiny point of fire shot up on the far horizon to the east. It was high enough among the lower stars to surely be on a mountain or crater of some sort, yet so tiny and far away as to be almost indistinguishable in the desert haze.

“There's Sid!” shouted Scotty triumphantly, gripping Niltci's buckskin-clad arm. “Now, how in the dickens did he ever get way over there? And if so, why did not Blaze come in by *this* gap?”

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Niltci stared at the flickering point of light for some time without replying. At times it died down to a mere red coal, so small as to be lost to eyesight entirely. Again it would flare up and appear quite strong.

"Mexicanos!" declared the Navaho boy at length.

"Mexicans!" echoed Scotty amazedly. "Why, that's Sid's camp fire, Niltci. Isn't it?"

"No. Fire, he was be on Cerro Colorado. Master Sidney, him no have go *there!*" answered Niltci.

In a flash Scotty saw that he was right. For no conceivable reason could Sid have gone that far distance to climb Cerro Colorado again. No; he had gotten into some sort of adventure with some wandering Indians back near the Hornaday Mountains, that was sure. Blaze's tracks all argued that. The dog had got away, wounded, and had followed their own tracks to camp, step by step.

Meanwhile, what of this Mexican camp fire on Cerro Colorado? It could only mean one thing: Vasquez had taken the train to Nogales in Mexico; had assembled a band of guerrillas; and they had ridden west by Sonoyta and Santo Domingo along the Sonoyta River, and now had climbed Cerro

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Colorado—for the same reason that Scotty and Sid had—to find Red Mesa!

And they had been disappointed. What would their next move now be? Scotty quivered with excitement all over as a possible solution of that question now came to him. Suppose the Mexicans were to push straight across this lava field for Papago Tanks! It was only fifteen miles in an air line. Bad going across the lava, but the Hornaday party had done it, and these Mexican riders could get across in just three hours after daylight!

Vasquez was not the man to give up a mine like Red Mesa without scouring this country for it, and Papago Tanks would be his natural base for such an expedition, Scotty argued to himself. These guerrillas would be upon them, then, by noon tomorrow! And meanwhile they themselves were now on the wrong side of the border. It was a case of get out, and get out quick! But where to? One thing was certain: Sid was back somewhere near the Pass. Their whole party must "roll their freight," as Big John would say, back there early next day, and leave no tracks behind them at Papago Tanks.

Tracks! They had left a million of them, written

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plain in the sands, and there would be no rain to wash them out for a whole season yet. The more Scotty thought it over the more certain he was that F-I-G-H-T! was sure to be the outcome of all this!

“We’ll get back to camp, right sudden pronto, Niltci!” he cried. “Mexicans is right. That’s Vasquez and Company, you bet! Le’s go!”

CHAPTER VIII

HANO

BEARING the water jug for Sid's pony, Hano descended that sulphur-fumed tunnel up which he had led the white boy not three hours before. It was now late in the afternoon; it would be nightfall before he could find the horse and ride. At the cave entrance one scout was on guard, a young fellow like Hano himself, not yet twenty. He rose respectfully as the chief's son came by.

"Ai, Hano!" he greeted, for he had heard nothing of the disturbance up in the village. He did not remark on the water jug nor question Hano about it, for such would have been contrary to his whole training. Only squaws asked idle questions.

Hano nodded and went on out. No one saw him from the lava basin brink, for the entire band was gathered in the council lodge for the sheep meat distribution. He climbed up the mountain side,

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following his original course downward with Sid, and soon disappeared over the ridge.

From there Hano began tracking Sid over on the Pass side. He noted with some surprise that the dog was now gone, but that did not matter much. Hano's face was set in a brown study of thought. He resembled his father, Honanta, strongly. The face was young and keen, with the high bony cheeks and the hard, thin facial muscles of youth, but it would acquire the same fullness as Honanta's with growing years. Indianlike, Hano was considering, not his own personal interests but his duty toward his tribe. To aid them he had broken his honor—that honor which required him to await the judgment of the old men even if unbound and free to go. It was repugnant to him to take the step because of Sid's words, but his duty to the tribe was paramount. The main thing, as he saw it, was to keep *all* these white men from ever discovering Red Mesa —The Arms of the Great Mystery. The white boy had spoken of Mexicanos coming. Hano knew them. Occasionally, not often, small parties of them had visited this region. They usually came by the Sonoyta River, following it until it lost itself in the sands to the south of Pinacate. From there they

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generally went to Represa Tank, from which the Camino del Diablo led them safely away from the mountains of Red Mesa. Only once in a great while had the Apache found it necessary to abolish one of these Mexican gentry who had become too inquisitive.

The white boy had told him also of a hound which could track him to Red Mesa. Hano doubted this not at all, for he had often heard in the lodge, of a winter's night, stories of the far-famed sagacity and the wonderful tracking nose of this dog of the white man's. He would like to have a dog like that himself for tracking mountain sheep. To capture or to kill him was one of the things that Hano decided to attempt.

Thus far Hano's plan had reached only the point of determining to watch both parties and to act for the best. If one party of whites killed the other it would be a fine thing, for that would leave this white boy alone in Red Mesa, and he would never be allowed to leave it alive. Hano hoped that he would eventually consent to adoption into the tribe, for he seemed a fine youth and his heart was good, too, or he would not have remembered his pony's thirst and brought that water jug.

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His name, too, was in his favor. *Col-vin!* How often had Hano heard that name on his father's lips when the story of that young white officer of long ago had been told! It was a sacred name in the clan. Because of it alone Honanta's entire attitude toward this white youth had changed, Hano knew, before he himself had been led away to the medicine lodge. This young Colvin, too, had set *him* free and begged him to bring his friends to Red Mesa because the Mexicanos were coming. That was all very well, but Hano decided that he would *not* do that, except as a last resort. Better let them all kill each other; then there would be no one but the white youth to deal with.

By this time Hano had climbed down the mountain on Sid's trail and found the pony. It was after dusk, and the familiar plain of giant cactus and creosote bush, of choyas and mesquites was dark in the shadows cast by the surrounding mountains, but the pony, a piebald, was easily distinguishable, picketed in a trampled ring of galleta grass. He had scented Hano, for an eager whinny came from him and Hano met the pony tugging at his lariat and thrusting out bared teeth and thirsty lips toward him in dumb appeal.

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Pinto drank the water in that jug down in one huge suck. Then Hano untethered him, coiled the lariat and rode off, following his tracks back to the main party. Darkness fell as he followed the pony prints to the kill of the mule deer. Two hours of slow trailing under the stars led him to the huge, bare craters where, up the eastern one, the tracks now led.

Hano walked the horse up the steep slopes, listening in the dark constantly for a sign of these other white men. He paused at the crater edge and looked down. A vast mysterious black cistern was that crater well!

Hano halted the pony and listened, for faint voices were coming up to him from below. They were down there! Presently the *Hoo-ooo!* of a hound's throaty challenge rang out. The dog was below and facing him, Hano knew instinctively from the direction of that sound. He drew back and waited. More voices; words in the white man's tongue. After a time he heard them climbing out slowly through the other gap. They stood on the opposite brink, one voice talking excitedly, audible in the dead of night even across the crater. Then they rode on.

Hano followed down into the dim cavern, crossed

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its sandy floor and worked his horse up the opposite gap. There, far to the east, he discerned a flaring watch fire, over on the Red Tepee, as his tribe called Cerro Colorado. So that was what these white men had become excited about? he exclaimed mentally, as he watched the fire awhile.

“Ugh! The Mexicanos!—Those that the white youth told me of!” decided Hano finally. As he watched, tiny flares began to move down the hill and out northwards on the plain. Hano counted twelve of these lights, moving slowly north apparently, though they were being carried by men on galloping horses. Immediately he divined it. Those lights were torches, carried by the Mexicans to see choyas ahead, and they were moving for Represa Tank!

From there their next ride would be either up the Camino del Diablo or—to his own mountains! And the white boy said they were coming!

What for, Hano did not know, but immediately all his plans underwent a sudden revolution. This must not be! There were twelve of the Mexicanos and only three of these other whites. The whole neighborhood from here to the Pass was filled with pony tracks made by the white boy’s friends. The

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Mexicans would be easily victorious over only three of them, and then the tracks would lead them to——

His mind made up at once, Hano started the pony at once around the crater in the direction the white men had just gone. To combine with them, to bring them to Red Mesa and have their help in defending his home was his people's only salvation—just as that white boy, Col-vin—blessed name!—had said.

But to ride on into a strange camp was entirely against Hano's Indian training. It might end in being shot or some other absurd mistake. The thing to do, now, was to get in touch with this Navaho that the white boy had spoken of. He was an Indian and both tribes spoke the Athapascan tongue. Aided by the sign language they could understand each other. The Navaho was the one to meet first!

Hano halted his pony. He could not be very far behind these whites now. He sent out his voice in the challenge of the big-horn ram, for he knew that the Navaho would understand that unnatural voice in the dead of night as a signal. Then he waited, his eyes alert, ears listening eagerly.

The bellow of a hound far ahead was his first reply. Then silence, profound and unbroken. After

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a short wait a man rose suddenly out of the ground before him. He pointed a rifle full on Hano: "Who are you?" he demanded in Navaho.

"Friend!" replied Hano, giving the peace sign.

The Navaho did not lower his rifle. "That pony? Where did you get him?" he asked sternly.

Hano explained rapidly in Apache, much of which the Navaho understood. He had scarcely time for more when the swift click of hound nails and the angry bellow of Ruler came out of the night. The dog rushed up toward Hano, barking savagely, tugging along Scotty who was holding back with all his strength on the leash. To a dog all strangers are enemies!

"What's all this, Niltci?" queried Scotty—"Good Lord!"

He stopped astounded and stared up at what was evidently a strange Indian on Sid's horse.

"Apache!" said Niltci. "Him come from Master Sid. Say all right. Must come quick."

"Is Sid hurt?" asked Scotty grimly.

"No. Him with Apache. Wants us to come quick," reiterated the Navaho.

"Well, I'll be darned! Keep your eye on him, Niltci—it may be some damned ruse. We'll take

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him in to see Big John and see what *he* says about it," decided Scotty.

Walking on each side of Sid's pinto, with rifles poised and ready for any treachery, they took Hano back to the camp at Papago Tanks. Big John roused out at their coming and threw a heap of brush on the fire.

"Jeemently-ding!—what you got thar!" he called out as the party came in. "An Injun on Sid's pony!—whar'd ye git him?—Say, fellers, I'm just sufferin' for the news!"

Scotty told him all Niltci had been able to learn from Hano during their march and then added the tale of their own discovery of the Mexicans.

"Shore's a fine mess you've got yore old uncle inter!" grinned Big John. "Them greasers is on Cerro Colorado, you say? Waal, *we* left our tracks on thet li'l hump, too! If it's that Vasquez, he's followin' 'em now—to see whar we went next, sabe? He won't make fer these here lava diggin's nohow; he'll make for Represa! An' he won't lose no time over it, either! Then they comes inter the Pass, same's we done. We'll meet 'em thar, plumb bright an' early to-morrow morning. They'll be ridin' all

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night. Thet fire ye saw on Cerro Colorado was jist a guide for night ridin'."

Hano nodded in confirmation. He told Niltci now that he had seen lights moving north across the plain before he left the crater rim.

"That settles it!" exclaimed Big John. "We rolls our freight out'n hyar right sudden pronto! An' it's goin' to be a sweet fight, if we don't git up into the mountains before that bilin' of greasers comes a-fannin' and a-foggin' through the Pass, old-timer!"

Dynamic was that decision of Big John's! The tent came down in a jiffy; the horses were roped and saddled; Blaze was made comfortable up on Sid's pony, a bed being built for him of every available blanket piled on the folded tent for a base. With Hano leading off through the dark, the cavalcade started at once back across the lava.

The horses' shoes clinked on its flinty surface; ghostly desert vegetation and tumbled masses of petrified lava bordered their trail. After several hours of careful riding came the huge cones of the craters, moving by like grim phantoms past them as slowly light began to dawn in the east. Ahead they saw spread out before them the jungled garden of

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the Pass, its green poles of saguarros standing silent sentinels all about in the dawn and the gray mountains hemming it in all around.

“Now, fellers, we cayn’t take them hosses promiscuous up no mountains, an’ I ain’t goin’ to leave old Blazie, nohow!” declared Big John as he halted the train. “This white mustang’s about as easy to hide here as a Saskatchewan swan! Thar’s shore goin’ to be some perishin’ lil’ rodero when them spiggoty gents arrives in our midst! Two of us hev gotto stay with these hosses.”

To hide them somewhere was the first thought of all. Big John’s puckered eyes searched the Pass for cover. Up ahead the mountains closed in to a narrow gap resembling a gunsight, a lone green saguarro upstanding in the center like a front sight in its V-notch. A small, bare rocky hillock to the right of the notch rose opposite a similar low spur terminating the range on their left. But down under the flanks of both of them they marked the high bushy green of mesquite.

“A feller *might* lay low in thar hoss an’ all,” declared Big John, sizing it up.

Scotty did not answer. He was scanning the mountain sides which towered above them, mile on

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mile, shaggy and gray and covered with pale green desert growth to a high skyline above. Somewhere, over beyond that ridge maybe, Sid was in camp with the Apache. Either Hano or Ruler could lead him up there. But a peculiar telepathic influence kept whispering to him that all was not right with Sid, that he needed him *now*, was in some sort of danger or trouble. It might have been just his own imagination; it might have been the subtle mental bond between the two chums, but the impulse was there and it led him to decide on climbing up at once.

"You take Niltci and the horses and go to the notch, John. If the Mexicans come in that way you can let them go by and then slip out through the gap and ride around the end of these mountains and join us. Meanwhile this Apache and I will climb up straight over the range to their camp. I have a hunch that it's over that mountain somewhere. Here's where we last saw Sid."

"Looks that way—'scusin' that the Injun'd knife ye as soon as he got you alone up thar! I ain't trustin' no Injun. Crooked as a Mex. gambler's deck, they be!" swore Big John emphatically.

Hano listened and watched them pointing, uneasily. He wasn't at all sure about showing these

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people Red Mesa after all. He had been reasoning over it silently as their party had ridden along. He had a new plan, now, and it was this: Here were four good horses. A number of Mexicanos, a dozen at least, were coming here after these white men. Well, then, would it not be the best service he could do for his tribe to induce them to lead the Mexicanos on a wild race out into the Tule Desert along the fearful Camino del Diablo, there to lose them all somewhere in the desert? He might die of thirst himself in the attempt. That was nothing; the peace and safety of his tribe was everything—any scheme to lead them all away from Red Mesa! These white men certainly could never survive that desert!

He now grunted eagerly and began to speak earnestly to Niltci in mixed sign language and Apache. He pointed to the notch and made the sign of four horsemen with his fingers straddled over his left hand. He pointed to Blaze and made signs of concealing him in some dense cover. Then he pointed to the notch again and gave a pantomime of their party galloping through it with other horsemen in pursuit.

“I got ye, son!” grinned Big John. “We-all give

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'em a desert race, hey? A-i idee!" he chuckled. "Scotty, if I know human natur, that pisen spig, that Vasquez"—Big John spat it out like a curse—"ain't told them guerrillas nothin' about no mine. Stolen church property's what they think they're after. They'll be considerable peeved, an' will begin shootin' soon's they sight us. Now if this Vasquez starts gittin' careless with his hardware—an' I git one good poke at him with the old meat gun—Sho!—there won't be nobody know *nothin'* about that mine but us, see? Another thing: when he climbs Cerro Colorado and don't see no Red Mesa, what does he do? Thinks he's disremembered what he read on that Dago tablet, *sabe*? He'll think I'm Sid, *sabe*, an' he'll chase us clar to Yuma, aimin' to get hold of it again. We don't want him 'round hyar, that's sure! I'm strong fer the Apache's racin' scheme. Hyar's one big chance to lose him good, savvy?"

"How about Sid?" objected Scotty.

"Oh, he's all right! Thick as thieves with these Apaches, I'll bet. He talks their lingo, you know."

Still the feeling remained persistent in Scotty's mind that all was not right with Sid. Where *were*

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these Apaches, anyhow; and why had Hano not taken them to their encampment at once?

"I've got it!" he exclaimed at length. "You leave Ruler with me. Go on with Niltci and the Apache and try your race stunt. Meanwhile I'll slip away, put Ruler on Sid's track, and so find out where he's gone myself."

"Not so good, son! Not so good!" approved Big John whismically. "You sorter hang back, then, an' git away when you kin. Try along the base of them mountains. I think Sid rode off that way when he left us. You leave them greasers to us! They won't bother you none! C'mon, fellers, le's get movin'. We ain't got *all* the time there is!"

Through Niltci he signified assent to Hano's plan. They started across the sands for the notch which now lay in plain daylight before them glowing with the colors of the rising sun. Gradually the three ahead urged their ponies to a gallop, twisting and turning through the patches of choyas and spiny barrel cactus.

Scotty fell behind, Ruler on his leash loping along beside him. As dense groves of mesquite barred their path he let himself get separated from the others and worked over toward the mountain base,

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keeping cover constantly between him and the party ahead.

In five minutes Scotty was completely lost to them. After a time he came upon lone pony tracks in the sand. Beside them had trotted Blaze's footprints. Here was where Sid had gone toward the mountain. Sheep hunting, no doubt, Scotty conjectured, for he knew that Sid liked to hunt alone. Nearer and nearer came the abrupt flanks of the mountains. Steep and rugged, rising in towering masses, the rocky flanks rolled up high above Scotty. Somewhere up there Sid had climbed, he was sure.

Presently he came upon a game trail, winding along in the sand around the rocky outcroppings. Sheep tracks! Scotty rode on hurriedly now, the hunting ardor rising within him. Presently he came to a little patch of galleta grass, trampled down in a ring around a picket pin, where a pony had fed. The story was plain to Scotty. Sid's pinto had been tethered here and had broken away after a time, probably because of thirst.

No; the Apache had *taken* him away, for here were his moccasin prints! Here were Blaze's, too, coming from the mountains. It became more and more a puzzle to Scotty. What had really hap-

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pened to Sid? It looked more than ever like treachery—foul play—to Scotty. Somewhere up on the mountain Sid had encountered the Apaches perhaps. He had been held by them, since he had not returned. But Hano had been here and had taken his horse. What did it all mean?

For a time Scotty hesitated, thinking seriously of riding after Big John to bring him and Niltci here to get their judgment on this discovery. Then he saw the firm heel print of Sid's hunting boot leading up the mountain side. The ardent impatience of youth at once overwhelmed him. Follow, and at once, he must!

He put Ruler's moist nose to the print: "Sssuey, Ruler!—Go get Sid!—Sid!" he hissed in the dog's ear.

Ruler whined eagerly. Then, snuffing the trail, he climbed on upward, his bony rat tail swinging in circles as occasional yelps of discovery came from him. Scotty climbed after and was soon high in the rocks on the mountain flank, with the green plain of the Pass spread out far and wide below him.

Meanwhile Big John and the two Indians had ridden on swiftly. The Pass narrowed and in ten

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minutes more they were at the base of the two low hills guarding the gap. Hano looked around him inquiringly.

“Where is the white boy?” he asked Niltci, anxiously.

“Oh, he’s back thar a-piece—he’s a slow rider,” laughed Big John reassuringly. Hano regarded them suspiciously a moment as Niltci translated. Then he shrugged his shoulders, his keen eyes searching the groves of mesquite and palo verde for signs of the laggard. A bed was made for Blaze under the shelter of a dense bunch of creosotes and he was tied there with a pan of water handy. Then the horses were tethered in hiding behind that growth of mesquite under the rock base which they had noted from down the Pass. Niltci and Big John unlimbered their rifles and climbed to a vantage point on the low rocky spur jutting out to the east of the main range.

They were not many minutes too soon! Over the waste of sand dunes to the north a small white cavalcade was toiling slowly along toward them. The guerrillas, about a dozen of them, they noted, were riding two by two. They were clad in white, with huge white sombreros on head and the shining

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bands of cartridge belts crossing their chests at a slant. Over their backs jutted up the slender muzzles of Mausers. Dandy black boots heavily spurred in silver gleamed through the dust along the flanks of their horses. At the head of the column alongside the leader rode a man clad in a striped serapé, and at sight of him Big John's eyes began to smoulder.

He pointed him out to Niltci. "Thar's that Vasquez, the pisen, ornery, li'l horned toad that's makin' all the trouble, Niltci!" he growled. "The mine ain't wuth shootin' nobody fer, though. We'll hev to throw an all-fired scare into him with a leetle fancy shootin', sabe?"

Niltci grunted understandingly and they both watched the cavalcade approaching. As they entered the Pass below, Hano's wild eyes glared up at them. Now was the time for his great sacrifice! In just a little while longer these Mexicans would be through the gap and nearing those mountains whose secret he felt bound to protect. They must never be allowed to remain here, to trace out those tell-tale tracks! He looked up at Big John for the signal to dash down to the ponies and begin that race that could only end in the arid wastes of the Camino del

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Diablo. Once out there, they could shoot him with those long-range rifles if they were able. But die of thirst they all surely would! As for himself, he trusted in his desert knowledge to survive until it would be safe to return to Red Mesa.

But, alas for the best laid plans of mice and men! Nature has a grim way of playing tricks that upset our best schemes—cruel tricks, sometimes. For, hardly had the Mexican riders gotten well through the gap with yells of delight as they followed the trail into that beautiful desert garden, when, from up on the high mountain flanks behind Big John's position, came a sudden rolling of stones bounding down the hill. The Mexicans all halted and looked up, shouting to each other eagerly. Big John looked around inquiringly, and Hano gazed with an expression of anguish in his black eyes. Up there ranged a band of mountain sheep! A large band, seventeen in all, if any one had stopped to count them. Rams, ewes and young ones, they were all clattering along the summit of the ridge, outlined clearly against the sky and headed for the fastnesses of the higher slopes.

At sight of them eager cries came from all the Mexicans. They began to dismount hurriedly.

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Rifles were unslung, cartridges hastily torn from the bandoliers. Then a wild race began up that mountain after those doomed sheep.

Hano gave a grunt of dismay. That chase could only lead to one thing—the immediate discovery of Red Mesa, the hiding place of his tribe that lay beyond those ridges!

CHAPTER IX

THE SUN DANCE

SID whirled swiftly, after Hano had gone. The slight swaying of a medicine skin—the pelt of an albino big horn—told him where the opening to the tunnel was. Lifting it aside, a jagged hole in the lava showed, and from below came up a faint tinge of sulphur smell. Sid thought first of going down into the tunnel and hiding in it somewhere, watching his chance to escape. Then he decided against it. He ought to give Hano all the time he could. That *both* of them had disappeared would be immediately noticed in the village. He looked around, thinking rapidly about what to do next. A bundle of plumed prayer sticks among the ritual appurtenances of the lodge caught his eye and it gave him the idea he was searching for. Going outside the lodge and closing its door, he secured it with a prayer stick. That sign would signify that the lodge was closed to all but medicine men and would keep out any casual stroller.

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It was now nearly sunset. Sid sought out Honanta again but he was not at his lodge. Sounds of busy life came from the grass huts. Fresh meat of the ram was being prepared for an evening feast; more of it was being hung on drying poles to cure in the sun. A knot of young braves was playing the hoop game, rolling the hoop swiftly along a path and striving to pierce it with lances as it sped.

Sid watched them awhile, a feeling of melancholy growing on him. These people were happy, free, and independent. Under Honanta's leadership they were living life simply and nobly, as the early Indians did. To match it, you had to go back two hundred years to the time when religion was everything in an Indian's life, when warfare was an incentive to chivalry similar to our own warfare of the middle ages; when there were no white men to set one tribe against another, to teach them to scalp one another by offering a bounty for the hair of a fellow red-man, or to sell them whisky and weapons far more deadly than any they naturally used.

Sid felt himself playing traitor to his best instincts when he thought of what the coming of Scotty and Big John would mean to these people. Scotty had come to the Pinacate region to find the

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Red Mesa mine. Well he, Sid, had found it for him! But he had not dreamed to find it also the home of a happy and peaceful band of red men—that race with which Sid was becoming more and more in sympathy.

But now look what would happen! Scotty would claim the mine, stake it out, ask him and Big John to sign as witnesses, and then file the claim with the government. And then, with the publishing of that claim, would come the inevitable stampede to this region. White men, hundreds of them; ships, rails, ore cars, burros, rough and sweating white miners—a rabble that would sweep Honanta and his people away like chaff. It did Sid little good to tell himself that he had sent Hano to bring his friends so that they could defend Red Mesa against the Mexicans. That would be a mere incident in the march of progress. Vasquez and his guerrillas would surely come here, riding along the border from Nogales. They would find the pony tracks, climb the mountain and discover Red Mesa. After that, no doubt Vasquez would fight for it. But even if defeated and driven off, there was Scotty to be reckoned with, for his heart was set on this mine, his whole future depended on it. That he

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would insist on providing for these Indians, of course, would be his natural instincts for right and justice. But he would insist, too, on the mine being developed. Sid doubted whether it could be done, in the nature of his race, without first bringing about the destruction of these Apaches. Honanta would never give this place up without a fight for it against all comers.

Sid wished that his father could be here to counsel him. He had almost a conviction that he was really that officer who had saved Honanta's life in Apache Cave so long ago. It would be just like him. That deed would give his father vast influence over the chief, and some way out of this tangle of perplexities would be found by the good old Colonel. Sid wished now that he had sent Hano direct to bring his father. The Colvin ranch was up in the Gila Cañon on the railroad not a hundred miles away. The name was already well known in Arizona, their station near the ranch being named "Colvin's" on the main line. Hano could have reached the rails by a fast push out to Tacna, and then have taken the train to Colvin's. That would bring the Colonel here in two days at most, for

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there was a railroad to Ajo Mines only fifty miles away from Pinacate.

But it was too late now. After-thought is mere aggravation! What would Hano really do, now that he was free? Sid asked himself. He confessed he didn't know. We know nothing of the Indian mind and its workings. We really know nothing of the race nor where they came from. Not Semitic, surely, for, Phœnician Jew or Arab, the accumulation of vast stores of wealth is the dominant Semitic trait, and the Indian scorns wealth and miserliness alike.

Sid was convinced that they are of the same Aryan stock as ourselves. If so, his theory was that they must have migrated east from Asia at a far earlier period than our own ancestors' westward migration, for we still have the Aryan word roots, while in America there are no less than three great Indian languages—Algonquin, Athapascan, Siouan—totally different, the peoples also as different in physical and moral characteristics as are our own Teutonic and Latin branches of the same Aryan stock.

We developed individualism as we migrated westward. The Indian developed it, too, in this great new land, but he retained one distinctive Asiatic

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trait—the impersonal ego—the sinking of self in the clan whose interests are always paramount to everything else.

Reasoning from that, Sid tried to conjecture what Hano's motives would be. To keep *all* these whites, Mexicans and his own friends alike, away from Red Mesa, the home of his clan; to kill Ruler, the tracking dog, so that Sid could not be traced here, seemed to Sid what Hano would really do. He would act on that basis, Sid was sure. His own chance of rescue, then, was really very slight. His life was safe for twenty-four hours, no matter what the old men might decide in council. After that his fate really depended solely on the identity of his name with that Colvin of Apache Cave! But how prove to Honanta that that man was Colonel Colvin himself? To claim it without proof would be taken by the Indians as a mere forlorn hope to save his own life. Hano could have brought that proof for him, given time enough; now it was too late. Sid gave it all up; there was really nothing to do but wait events.

The sun was setting as Sid finished his ruminations. The water pool already lay in shadow, the black bottom of its lava basin turning the deep blue-

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green of its waters to a mirror of shining black. A sharp shadow line was creeping in horizontal masses of dark maroon far up on the face of the east wall, every broken fissure and pinnacle of the west wall shadow etched on its high face. Sid kept one eye nervously on the door of the medicine lodge, wondering how it was all going to turn out. No one had visited it yet, but discovery of Hano's escape was sure and would come soon.

As Sid waited and watched, Honanta came out of a sweat lodge near the borders of the tank. He was naked save for breech cloth and moccasins, and slowly he walked to the brink of the lava basin where it tumbled out between the high walls of Red Mesa. Like some magnificent bronze statue he stood for a time on the brink, facing the setting sun, his arms outstretched in silent prayer. Then an old man tottered out from the council lodge bearing a ceremonial pipe. Honanta took it from him and, after a few whiffs, held its bowl toward the setting sun. Again he dipped it reverently toward Mother Earth and the sunset ceremony was ended. Sid noted that he did not add the modern symbolism of offering the pipe to the four winds.

After him every brave in the tribe, down to the

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little boys of eight, stood and did the same thing, that act of reverence to the Earth and Sun, the most important of the creations of the Great Mystery, which ethnologists often stupidly report as sun worship, earth worship. But Sid knew that, like their nature worship, it was really reverencing the Great Mystery through His creations. He had long ago adopted that viewpoint as his own, and was about to share in the ceremony himself, claiming the privilege as an adopted Blackfoot, when a soft footfall along the path drew his attention.

The girl Nahla was approaching the medicine lodge! She bore food and water for her husband, the prisoner. Sid felt tingles of excitement running all through him as he rose and walked rapidly after her.

“Nahla!” he called, as soon as they were far enough away from the rest of the village to be alone.

The girl turned and faced him.

“Do not enter!” he said softly in Apache.

“Oh, have they killed him?” she almost shrieked. “*Hai—I hate you!*” Like a fury she faced the bewildered Sid. It was his first experience with women—the instant feminine jumping to conclu-

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sions, the fierce and unreasoning hate for the cause of her sorrows.

“No. He lives; but do not enter the lodge, I beg you. You must trust in me, Nahla!” said Sid earnestly.

The girl shrugged her shoulders scornfully. “Pah! And is my husband to go without food and drink!” she spat out. With a lithe, sudden dash she had reached the lodge door and put her hand on the plumed prayer stick that held it shut.

Sid leaped after her. “No!” he barked. “Listen, Nahla—Hano is gone! I freed him. I sent him. They do not know, yet.”

The girl turned about, suspicion burning in her black eyes. “*You?*” Rapidly anguish filled her whole expression, then anger. “You made him run away!” she accused. “You made him break his honor—you, white man with a serpent’s tongue!”

With a swift movement she withdrew the prayer stick and flung wide the door. Unmindful of Sid’s expostulations she stood for a moment looking inside. Then she turned and ran shrieking toward the huts. “Hano! My Hano! He is gone! He has broken his honor! The white man freed him!

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—Honanta! Honanta!” she cried, running along the path.

Sid looked after her helplessly. Honanta was stalking toward her as fast as his dignity would permit. They stopped and exchanged a few words. Sid braced himself for what was coming, hoping that his wits would save him this time.

Honanta came up to him, his face a dark thunder-cloud, angry lines seaming it. “What is this, white boy?” he demanded.

“I freed Hano, chief. I had a good reason for it. You must trust me,” replied Sid, as stoutly as he could in the face of that towering passion.

“Yes?” said Honanta, craftily, controlling himself. “Why?” He was speaking in Apache now, and so was Sid, the subterfuge that he did not understand it being abandoned by both.

“You shall learn, soon, chief. I am acting for the good of us all,” said Sid earnestly.

Honanta studied him awhile in silence. “My son, because your name is Col-vin I have persuaded my old men to spare your life. My heart tells me that you may be the son of that officer who spared my mother and me—whose name also was Colvin. In freeing Hano I believe that you meant well. But it

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is dark to me why *my* son, Hano, consented to run away! His honor required him to await the judgment of my old men, even if not a thong bound him."

"He, too, did it for the sake of the tribe, Honanta," declared Sid with profound conviction.

Honanta knitted his brows, puzzled. "My son," said he gently, "is not the truth best? No—you do not lie!" he added hastily as a frown gathered in Sid's face, "but you know more than we do. I must tell what you *do* know to my old men, for they are very wise and their decision is final. You have told me nothing that gray hairs can listen to, so far," he concluded persuasively.

Sid reflected. Would it not be better to tell the whole truth *now* and trust in Honanta's judgment? He decided to tell part of it anyhow, for Big John and Scotty might be led here by Ruler to-morrow, he felt, and he might as well explain them now.

"I sent Hano to bring my friends here," he replied. "They have a tracking dog—a hound—and could trace me here in any event, so I wanted to avoid a fight. The dog would lead them to Red Mesa, chief."

"And so you sent Hano!" laughed Honanta. "My son Hano would kill that dog, kill those friends

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of yours, too, sooner than permit them to reach our home! Did you not think of that?"

Sid attempted to show his surprise at this Indian point of view on his action, but the idea was not new, to him and the chief saw it.

"Come! There is more back of it, yet, my son!" prompted Honanta. "The truth—and I will do what I can for you with the elders."

"There's a party of Mexicans coming along the border," replied Sid desperately. "They will find our tracks and trace us all to this place. I felt that we needed my friends to help you defend it, Honanta. That's the whole truth."

"Ha!—No! There is more!" exclaimed Honanta, his choler rising. "Why are the Mexicanos coming? And why is your party down here? Do you think I do not know why? Somehow, the tale of our mine has gotten out! Don't I know what white men will do to possess themselves of a mine? What *won't* they do!" he exclaimed bitterly. "You are all our enemies!"

"Not I!" retorted Sid, stoutly. "I am an ethnologist—no miner! The study of your people is my lifework, chief. Sympathy for them has become my ruling passion. Since I came here, my

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one idea has been to preserve this place forever as your home. I'll seal my friend's lips forever about this mine——”

Sid stopped hastily, for he had made a slip that he had not intended. It did not escape Honanta, however.

“No! *we* shall do that!” he said grimly. “My son, you are an enemy to us. You cannot help yourself. But, because of him who saved my mother and you who represent him, I have vowed to give a Sun Dance to-morrow. You must be present at it, for you are the physical evidence of my deliverer. According to our laws of hospitality you have one sun of immunity among us. But to-morrow, when his shadow reaches *there*,” the Chief pointed to a great crack on the inside of the west wall—“you must go forth—if you can. . . . As for your friends, we shall take care of them if Hano does not!”

He turned and motioned to two of his braves. “Bind him!” he commanded. “Medicine lodge!”

They stepped forward and seized Sid. In a very few minutes he found himself seated, firmly bound to the very post from which he had freed Hano but recently. The food Nahla had brought for Hano

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was fed him; then the door was shut and he was left in the darkness of the lodge.

Sid reflected over it all as he sat, awaiting the long vigil until morning. Escape was impossible. Not only was he bound cunningly to the post so that any movement of even his hands was impossible, but two Apache guards squatted near him, silent as specters but watching him fixedly.

“Go forth—if you can!” had been Honanta’s last words. In them Sid found his sole hope. Honanta was still his friend, but the logic of the situation had been too strong even for him. But Honanta was more than his friend. It was true, then, that Colonel Colvin was that white officer! Honanta had said so at last. Through his father he owed a debt that to an Indian is never paid. Honanta, too, was torn between two duties—that to his tribe and that to Sid as the Colonel’s son. In the subtle workings of the Indian mind there would surely be a loophole for him, somewhere, by Honanta, Sid felt. It was for him to find and utilize that loophole of escape. It would be something that would clear Honanta’s conscience as regards his tribe, yet fulfill his obligation to him as the son of the man who had saved his life.

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What it would be, Sid could not imagine. He decided to keep his eyes open to-morrow, alert to seize the opportunity whatever it should be. Then, with the ability of youth to sleep anywhere and in any impossible posture, his head fell forward on his chest and he was soon oblivious of his and any one else's troubles.

Next morning as he was led from the lodge, a notable change in the village greeted him. A high Sun Dance pole had been erected during the night, with a cross bar secured near its top. From the bar dangled two effigies; the figure of a man and of a mountain sheep. Sid recognized the symbol of it. The figure represented Honanta, dead but for the intervention of the Great Mystery in the person of that white officer who had spared his mother. The mountain sheep represented man's physical life, his principal means of sustenance, the gift of Mother Earth, replacing the buffalo of plains ceremonies.

After a time Honanta appeared, nude save for his moccasins and breech clout; his hair was disheveled, his body daubed with clay. He dragged after him the skull of a mountain sheep, symbolizing the grave from which he had escaped by divine intervention.

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As the eastern sun flamed over the wall of Red Mesa, an old priest cut and scarified Honanta's chest, signifying the natural accompaniments of a physical death.

The rest of the tribe now formed in a line under the east wall and faced him. Sid himself was placed opposite Honanta, standing alone. He felt awed at the part he was taking—for he obviously represented the instrument through which the Great Mystery had shown His favor.

Looking with fixed eyes on the sun, Honanta began the Sun Dance, dragging the skull after him and blowing from time to time on a sacred whistle which he kept pointed at the sun as it rose toward the zenith.

Sid watched him, fascinated. He was seeing the original Sun Dance, the Indian symbol of death and resurrection, as it was before later changes degraded it into a meaningless exhibition of endurance under torture—about on the level with our own bull-ring and prize-fight arena. How long the dance would keep up depended solely upon Honanta's physical endurance. He was not much over forty years of age, so he would be yet in his prime, and his fervor would

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lead him to dance before the Great Mystery until his sinews could work no longer.

Sid's prayers went out to aid him. He liked to see a man give his best! This humbling of the body was nothing repulsive, when one thought of the exalted mood of that soul, engaged in an act of Indian worship so far above our own milder and, let us say, more self-indulgent and vanity-ridden forms of ritual.

An hour passed; two hours, while still the devoted Honanta maintained the peculiar syncopated rhythmic dance of the Indian. Occasionally his voice rose in a wild, high chant, relating the story of his rescue by that white officer of long ago. He called on the soul of his mother to witness; poured out prayers in thankful chants to the Great Mystery.

Sid watched, himself entirely in sympathy, the whole band of Apaches gradually working themselves to higher and higher exaltation of religious feeling. He hardly noted the passage of time until a glance over to the west wall brought home to him with a sudden shock that the shadow of the east wall had nearly reached that crack in the granite. His time was coming soon!

Others had noticed it, too, for one of the elders

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spoke a word. With a final invocation to the Great Mystery, Honanta slowly brought his dance to a close. He tottered toward Sid, his eyes sightless, his hand groping until it gripped Sid's.

Sid felt a renewed fervor in that grip, but all Honanta said was: "My son, guide me—for you must now go forth from us."

One of the braves pressed Sid's rifle into his hands. Leading Honanta, Sid started for the medicine lodge. Young bucks and elders surrounded them. They were fully armed and their faces expressed the grim determination of the executioner. Sid guided Honanta to the outlet of the tunnel and himself raised the medicine sheepskin.

"Careful, my father!" he warned courteously, putting Honanta's hands on the ladder post.

They descended, the tunnel filled with creeping warriors, ahead and behind them. Sid could not see what chance there was for his life in this! To whirl and shoot the instant his foot left the cave?—before he could move, a flight of arrows would feather themselves in him! If Honanta had a loophole in mind it must be provided soon!

But the party crept on down steadily. Then along each side of the cave entrance the bucks parted

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and lined up with arrow on string. Sid drew a long breath and stepped steadily to the entrance. Beyond that he could not go, without death. Bows creaked as he turned slowly, to find arrows drawn to the head upon him.

But Honanta was close behind him. "You must go forth, now, my son," he pronounced gravely.

Sid tensed every muscle in his body, intending to throw himself down the lava crevice and then turn and shoot for his life. It was a forlorn hope, but—

Two long, fringed, buckskinned arms closed slowly around him as his foot lifted for the first step. Sid halted wonderingly—but the push of Honanta urged him on:

"Go forth, my son—and *I will go with thee!*" whispered the chief's voice in his ear. "I cannot see thee slain! Let them shoot!"

Honanta's own arms were around him now, his body protectingly between him and the Apaches. *That* was the way he had solved his dilemma!

Sid backed rebelliously. "No, chief! No! You must not!" he protested, attempting to turn in the chief's arms. The utter silence of astonishment

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was all around them, the Apaches hesitating, arrow on bow, utterly disconcerted at this sudden development.

“On! While there is time!” grated the chief’s voice. “We shall escape to your people. They must never find Red Mesa. I trust you, my son, to keep silence!” urged Honanta.

Sid nodded. Honanta had found the best way out of it all. They were about to go on, letting the tribe decide as it would, when the distant *Rrrraammp! Rrrraammp! Rrrraammp!* of rifle shots coming from over the mountain arrested them.

“Halt! It is too late, Honanta!” barked Sid. “Listen!”

A fusillade of distant rifle shots broke out; then the rapid, continuous discharge of a repeating rifle.

“Ten shots!” said Sid. “That’s the Navaho’s Winchester, chief. Ours hold only five. Those other shots are *Mausers*—not hunting rifles! The Mexicans are here!”

He pushed Honanta back in the cave and then faced the Apaches. “Warriors of the Apache, I must stay and fight with you!” his voice rang out. “Those rifles are of Mexicanos, coming to take your

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home. After it is all over you can do what you will with me. Is it peace?"

The Apaches nodded sullenly and lowered their bows. Without Honanta they were leaderless.

"Let no one go out!" ordered Sid. "We need every man right here!"

CHAPTER X

THE DEFENSE OF RED MESA

AS the Mexican rifles whipped and sang in the crags sheep after sheep staggered and fell. Hano's eyes blazed with indignation. At least six of these white-clad Mexicanos were up there and three of the sheep were killed, a noble ram and two ewes, but still the slaughter went on unceasingly. That band of big horns and a few others like it around Pinacate were almost the sole meat supply of Hano's tribe. A few each year had been plenty to keep them all in meat. *One* ram would have been more than enough to feed all this band of white men all they could carry away, yet nothing less than the slaughter of them all—brutal, thoughtless, insensate killing for the mere pleasure of shooting seemed their purpose. Higher and higher the Mexican hunters climbed, following the doomed sheep up to the ridges. Once over them and—

With a great bitter cry of rage at the sickening

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insatiate greed of it, Hano rose to his feet, snatched Niltci's rifle from his hands and emptied it in rapid shots. He sent bullets whistling among the hunters up in the crags, then shot down horses among that group closely packed in the Pass below them. Dashing down the empty weapon with a curse of rage, he bounded down through the mesquite and was lost to sight. Niltci, himself overwhelmed with indignant sympathy over this useless slaughter of wild life, had not interfered with Hano and he now picked up the rifle and reloaded it.

"Good hunch, Injun! Shootin' them hosses is our best bet arter all!" muttered Big John to himself raising the meat gun to his shoulder. He aimed full at the serapé-clad rider who sat his horse, yelling up at the hunters above and signaling urgently to them to return.

"Greaser, I could kill you now, an' end all this to onct," he muttered, "but ontil you shoots at me fust, I cayn't do it." He lowered the sights a trifle and pulled trigger. Instantly the horse which the Mexican rode collapsed and fell kicking on the sands. Vasquez jumped free.

"*Gringoes! Enemigos! Tira! Tira!*" he yelled, shaking his fists and pointing wildly.

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Big John went on shooting, picking off horse after horse. Niltci's rifle was thundering in his ears, for the indignant Navaho had turned *his* fire on the sheep slaughterers now scrambling madly down the hill. A wild commotion had broken out in the confused knot of horses and men that were left of the cavalcade. Presently a band of five of them mounted and rode swiftly toward their position. Then down below a single war whoop rang out and Big John saw a lone Indian rider dash out into the Pass. It was Hano, making his sacrifice of leading as many as possible of the enemy after him away into the desert. A fusillade of shots greeted him; then the rapid clatter of hoofs as the whole band swept by, Hano far in the lead on Sid's pony. Big John dropped the foremost horse as they passed below him; the rest swept by quirting their mounts furiously as Hano disappeared over a swale in the sand dunes.

"Now we got to settle with Mister Vasquez!" exclaimed Big John grimly. "Thar's still half a dozen of them with him, against the two of us up yonder."

But Niltci did not hear for he had crept up to a better position. He had seen nothing of Hano's

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race as he was too hotly engaged with the Mexicans on the hillside.

Big John peered out of his rocky lair, looking for "that ornery Vasquez." A glimpse of him showed high among the rocks; then his rifle barked and the bullet spanged the rocks near by. The other Mexicans were now well concealed in the crags and the crack of their rifles and the whine and smash of Mausers about Big John's position told him that the battle was on in dead earnest. For a time the fight remained stationary, both sides so well concealed that no quickness of sight could register a direct hit. Then a shot rang out, much nearer to the left.

"Bad business, Niltci," called out Big John, "they're working down this way an' hev got us cornered on this little knoll. We gotto do a sneak around this point and git above them somehow."

Niltci had already foreseen the danger, for he was now creeping snakelike through the rocks around the right flank of the knoll.

Big John grunted whimsically as he followed after: "Gosh dern it, I ain't even goin' to *act* civilized, pronto, if these hyar doin's keeps up! I don't like that party in the barber-pole poncho, none,

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an' I'll get careless and drill daylight through him ef I don't watch myself!" he soliloquized.

Then he came out on the right flank of the knoll, where all that vast interior angle of the mountain range burst at once into full view. For a moment he peered out and just stared! A huge black apron of lava fell out of the high lap of the mountains and spread far and wide down the slope until lost in the sands. But, dominating the gap where this lava flowed out, he saw two immense red walls, cast up like opening trapdoors of granite. From his position the whole formation could be grasped in its entirety and its resemblance to a mesa struck Big John at once.

"She looks jest like Thunder Mountain up near Zuñi to me," he muttered wonderingly, "only she's red. *Red Mesa*, by gum!" he exploded, as the conviction smote upon him. "An' that pesky Sid's been and gone an' found it! Thar's whar he is, now, with them Apaches, I'll bet my hoss! Wouldn't that knock ye dead?"

Silent, majestic, imposing, Red Mesa shimmered in the morning sun, high above all. That it held the secret of Sid's disappearance and explained the mys-

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tery of these Apaches was a conclusion that Big John jumped to instinctively.

And then a shrill squall of triumph rang out high on the mountain side above him! Big John crawled to a better outlook and gazed upward. Exposed on a ragged pinnacle, Vasquez stood waving a rifle triumphantly over his head and screaming in Spanish unintelligibly. That he had seen Red Mesa, too, and was calling to himself all his guerrillas there was no doubt at all!

Big John raised his rifle carefully, its tall front sight rising high above the rear bar. "Four hundred, five hundred; no, more'n six hundred yards!" he muttered. "It'll be some stretch for the ole meat gun, but, greaser, you've looked at this parteebler scenery all you're entitled to!"

He held the bead steady, resting his elbow on a rock. Gradually his muscles cramped in a rigid pose while the tiny dot up there in the crags hovered motionless over the tip of his front sight.

"Sho! greaser," said Big John, lowering the rifle. "Y'ain't done nawthin' yit what I orter kill ye fer! Yore int'rested, jist now—it's our chanct to make a run for it an' git between you an' th' home plate, I'm thinkin'. Siddy boy, I aims to reach ye this trip!"

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He crept rapidly down to where Niltci lay concealed and touched him on the shoulder. Together they wormed swiftly down the mountain and reached the sands. Here the high flanks concealed them from the view of those above. After one sharp glance around by Niltci, both ran at full speed along the base. Up and up at a gentle slant for some half a mile the sand drift led them, until they had arrived at the foot of the lava flow where it dipped down below the sands. Along its vitrified surface they sped—and then Big John stopped and gripped Niltci's arm, breathing heavily. Above them on the lava slope an apparition had appeared. A man crouched in a sort of cave mouth up there, and he bore a rifle in his hands. He waved energetically to Big John to get under cover at once.

"Ef that ain't Sid you can call me a tin-horn gent!" gasped Big John. "*Whoopee, Sid!* Keep down!—*Look out, watch yourself!*" he yelled out alarmedly.

His outcry was fatal. A rifle whanged out up in the cliffs above and instantly came the sharp thud of a bullet. Big John coughed, groaned in the inflectionless cry of the unconscious, and tumbled in a heap on the rocks. Niltci gave one swift glance up-

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ward at the man in the serapé who had fired, then grabbed Big John and dragged his huge shape under the shelter of a crag. Sid had disappeared as if struck flat, but the whip of his army carbine rang out sharply. A volley of shots replied, coming from all over the hillside. Bullets struck the lava apron and went whining off into space; more of them plunged down around Niltci's position.

Bits of granite flew in a sharp dust about him. The place was utterly untenable. Niltci looked for a better lair, noted a little hollow in the crags and then jumped out and exposed himself to draw their fire for an instant. He heard shot after shot whipping out from where Sid lay, felt the terrific smash of Mausers all around him, then he picked up Big John and raced with him for cover. A sharp touch seared his arm. He felt it grow paralyzed in spite of him and it let the cowman drop violently against the rough scoriated boulders. A groan came from Big John, showing that he still lived, then the Navaho flung himself into the lair and rolled the great limp body in after him.

But this could not last! It was as hot a corner as man ever got into. Sooner or later flankers from the guerrillas above would find a position from

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which it could be fired into, and then nothing could save them. Niltci raised his voice in a low Navaho's death chant, watching the rocks above him from a crevice in his lair, rifle poised for instant use. He needed help badly. Finally he sent out the word for it in a ringing call that would be understood by the Apaches, if any were near. It would be upon their honor to respond.

An occasional desultory shot now came from Sid, up there on the lava apron. Above on the mountain was silence, sinister, and foreboding. The Mexicans were creeping carefully, silently downward toward him. Presently there would be a rush of overwhelming numbers—then death!

Niltci waited, finger on trigger, eyes alert. A slight sound and the rolling of a stone came from somewhere above, but he could see nothing without exposing himself to he knew not what danger. It had been Big John who had rescued *him* from his own kinsmen, during those fanatical disturbances caused by the Black Panther of the Navaho, and Niltci would never desert him now! Coolly, resignedly, he awaited that final rush that would be the end of them both.

A rapid movement and the flinging of a body

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down behind some rocks sounded above him, right close now. Sid's rifle sang out but its bullet was too late. Relentlessly they were closing in!

A low groan sounded below Niltci. He glanced back out of the corner of his eye and saw that Big John's eyes were open. His face was livid, drawn and gray, but he was turning feebly on his side and fumbling at the big revolver strapped to his thigh.

"Watch yoreself—Injun—I'm gyardin'—yore rear," muttered the cowman hoarsely.

Niltci felt better. Big John was alive and could shoot, anyhow! He moved to a new position where he could command more of the rocks above. White-clad figures dodged instantly out of sight behind rocks as he appeared. They were all quite near him, not over forty yards off. All that was needed was some signal to precipitate a concerted rush. Niltci looked about him for help again. Only the silent lava wall and the surety that Sid was on watch up there gave him any hope at all. Well, it would soon come! All he hoped for was the chance of a few shots from the repeater before one of these buzzing Mauser bullets brought final oblivion.

And then, far above on the mountain side, sounded the rapid belling of a hound!

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Ruler! Scotty was coming, and he would take them *all* in the rear! Niltci fingered his trigger eagerly as the musical notes floated nearer and nearer: "Come, white boy! Come!" he sang, in urgent Navaho chanting.

A heavy repeating rifle opened up, its familiar cannonlike roars sounding sweet in the Indian lad's ears. That .405 could outrange anything on the mountain, and Scotty was a dead shot!

Yells and cries broke out all around him above. Men rose bewildered while Niltci emptied his repeater and Sid's rifle spoke rapidly, shot after shot from the lava. The guerrillas were breaking, running. Like snakes they were creeping off to new points, out of reach of that heavy .405 whose bullets split the granite where they struck!

Niltci felt that the psychological moment for attack had come. This whole movement was bearing off to the left now, the only place where the guerrillas could be safe from fire above and below. He leaped forward, darting from cover to cover and firing at every sight of a white figure among the rocks. Behind him he heard ringing Apache war whoops, and, looking back, saw the whole lava slope covered with buckskin-clad figures that had come

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from he knew not where. In a moment more his own mountain flank had swallowed them all up. Niltci gave a single answering cry and pressed on.

Then he stopped, his heart stricken dead with sudden alarm, for a whirl of objurgations in Spanish raged below him and he saw a serapé-clad figure racing along under the crags of the base, headed straight for where Big John lay concealed! Niltci turned and flung himself down the mountain, exposing himself recklessly. To get to the wounded Big John before this demon could finish him—ah, might the Great Mystery lend him wings! In three leaps he had reached the rocks above the lair. He jumped out, rifle at shoulder, unmindful of anything but not to be too late. Niltci got one glimpse of Vasquez, standing with rifle poised, his eyes glaring with surprise, for instead of Sid—the boy with the Red Mesa plaque—Big John lay facing him, lying on his side, cool resolution shining steadfastly in his eyes, the big revolver poised in a hand that nevertheless shook with weakness.

But before either of them could pull trigger a war bow twanged resonantly and the swift flash of an arrow swept across Niltci's face. He saw Vasquez tottering, faltering, and crumpling slackly; heard the

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rifle and the revolver bellow out together—and then a tall Apache chief stood before him, breathing laboredly, his eyes flashing the wild fire of war. Niltci held his ground and his rifle half raised. Peace or war with this chief, the Navaho boy faced him undaunted and Niltci was going to defend that place to the last! Below him was the little rocky lair where lay Big John, silent, face downward.

The Apache raised his hand in the peace sign. "Navaho, thou art a brave man! He that risks his life for a friend!" he dropped his arm significantly as if to say that no higher test of character existed. "Come; my young men pursue them, and none shall escape. Let us take this white man where his wounds can be cared for, my brother."

Just at that instant Sid came around the rocks about the lava lair. For a moment he stood looking, first at Big John lying silent as death, then at Niltci sitting dazedly and weak on the ground. His eyes glanced only once at the huddled figure of Vasquez.

"Oh! oh!—Big John! Is he dead!" he cried, the sudden catch of a sob in his voice.

He went over quickly to Big John and felt under his shirt. Then he looked up, worried, anxious, but hope shone in his eyes. "He's alive, Chief! But we

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must act quickly, for he's losing blood fast. Help me, Honanta," cried Sid urgently.

Together they got at the wound. That Mauser had plunged downward, smashing through the shoulder at a slant; tipped a lung, as the red froth on Big John's lips showed, and had come out in a jagged tear below the big muscle on his chest. He breathed laboredly and his eyes were still closed. Sid shook his head and there were tears in his own eyes. To lose Big John, that faithful, devoted old friend who had raised him and Scotty from cubdom, had been with them on a dozen expeditions, a thousand hunts—it was unbelievable!

"I've seen worse. My medicine men can cure him!" said Honanta cheerily. "We shall bring him to our village, and all will be well. My son, your friends are *our* friends! They have done well!"

"Thank you, Honanta," said Sid, simply. "I have yet one more thing to ask you to do, and then this whole business will come out all right."

"And that is?" asked the chief, smiling.

"To come with me and meet my father," said Sid earnestly.

"*Ai!*—I shall go with you soon! But first,

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where is *my* son, Hano? Not yet have I heard his war cry," replied Honanta anxiously.

Niltci turned from his guard of the place and approached the chief. "He came to us, Apache. He led us to these mountains. Then came the Mexicanos. We were to run them a race away into the desert with our fast horses. But they saw sheep on the mountain. They started killing them—ugh, but it was a slaughter sickening to see! More than many, many white men could eat, they shot! Then rose up your son, Hano, out of ambush and cursed them, as I too would have done. He fired my rifle at them, killing many horses. When the shells were all gone he left us. That is all I know."

"Who *does* know what became of Hano, then, Niltci?" inquired Sid eagerly.

The Navaho pointed to the silent figure of Big John.

"Hai!" breathed Honanta's deep voice. "He *must* live! I *must* know what has happened to my son! If he died, it was as a great chief should die, for his people. If he lives, this white man shall tell us and my best trackers shall seek for him. Come!"

They all picked up the inanimate form of Big John and carried him slowly along the lava apron

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brink. From afar came the occasional crack of a rifle. The chase had gone a long distance to the westward. Once they heard the bellow of Scotty's .405 from far down beyond the knoll. The peculiar volume of it was unmistakable, easily told from the sharper whip of the Mausers. Sid would have liked to join him, but his duty now was to see Big John under competent care. He had great faith in those Apache medicine bundles. There were healing herbs in them that the Indians alone knew; not all their "medicine" was sorcery and meaningless medicine dances, for in the treatment of wounds they were wonderful.

Up the steep ascent and through the sulphur-fumed reaches of the cave tunnel they bore Big John. When he had been laid on a couch in the medicine lodge and the old men had set to work at his wounds, Sid called Niltci to him.

"I want to show you this Red Mesa, Niltci," he said, "for my heart is heavy within me. We can do no further good here."

Together they went out into the little valley, Niltci's cries of pleasure over its isolation and peace as detail after detail of it was grasped by his keen Indian mind singing in Sid's ears. It made him even

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more depressed. What would Scotty's reaction to all this be? Scotty, the practical, hard-headed engineer, who would no doubt hop on this mine with a howl of delight and pooh-pooh any suggestion of abandoning it to the Apaches as their home. The first white man who staked out a claim here owned it. These Indians *had* no rights. How could he reconcile Gold with Nature in Scotty's mind—dissuade him from taking his civic rights, for the sake of this people?

Sid wanted to have his mind made up before they set out to join Scotty. He watched Niltci as they came opposite the mine fissure. The Navaho boy stopped with another exclamation of pleasure. He was an expert silversmith himself, and he recognized the metal instantly amid the dull copper. But in Niltci's eyes there showed no hint of possessing it, of taking this whole mine for himself. This metal was for all, the gift of Mother Earth to the whole tribe, according to his training. He would be just as welcome to set up his forge here and smelt all the silver he wanted as the Apaches were to make arrow tips of the copper. He told Sid this artless viewpoint as the latter questioned him, seeking light in his perplexity.

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Sid shook his head. How different from Scotty's idea! A claim that gave exclusive ownership; vast engineering works; ships; an organization that would take *all* this metal for *one* man's enrichment—that was the white man's way!

"Come, we must go find Scotty, Niltci," said Sid despondently, leading him away.

Honanta bid them good-by, assuring them that Big John was doing well. Sid went down the cave tunnel feeling like a traitor. His worst problem was still ahead of him, he thought.

But the Great Mystery had planned otherwise, in His inscrutable ways. For, when they reached the lair where Big John had fallen, Vasquez was gone! Honanta's arrow had *not* killed him; he had been simply feigning death while they were working over Big John!

CHAPTER XI

GOLD VERSUS NATURE

“**H**OW goes it, Big John?” asked Sid cheerily, coming into the medicine lodge the morning after the big fight.

“Bad breath, worse feet—I’m mostly carrion, I reckon,” smiled Big John weakly from his bandages. “All-same turkey-buzzard.”

Sid laughed gayly. There was no quenching the giant Montanian’s humor so long as the breath of life existed in him! “Guess you’re better, all right!” he answered, relieved.

“Whar’s my dear friend, Mister Spigotty?” inquired Big John with elaborate sarcasm. “Last I seen of *him*, he was fixin’ to turn loose a machine-gun onto me.”

“We’re still worrying about him, John,” replied Sid seriously. “He got away. The chief’s arrow took him just as he was about to pull trigger on you, but I think that loose serapé he wore saved him. An arrow just loses its punch in it. Anyway, he

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was only playing 'possum while we were fixing you up, thinking he was done for. We haven't seen the last of him by a long shot. Ever hear the fate of the Enchanted Mesa, John? That's what's worrying me now."

"Yaas," said Big John, slowly. "Earthquake shook down the trail up to her, didn't it? Then the hull tribe up thar jest nat'rally starved to death."

"That's what the ethnologists proved when they finally got up on Enchanted Mesa," agreed Sid. "The Indian legend persisted that a tribe had once been marooned up on that sheer-walled stronghold. No one believed it was more than a legend until the mesa was visited by an aeroplane or something and then they found the ruins of an old pueblo. Did you ever think, John, that this cave of ours is the *only* gate to Red Mesa? If Vasquez blows *that* up with dynamite we're all doomed to starve here—another Enchanted Mesa!"

"Yaas," sighed Big John, wearily. "But Vasquez shuts hisself out'n his own mine, that way, though. An' whar's yore dynamite?"

"He'll have some. Sure about that," said Sid, confidently. "A man doesn't go mining without it nowadays. And then, here's the dickens of it: he

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can't do anything about this mine with us around, see? But, if he can shut us up here, all he's got to do then is to hang around—and let Nature do the rest! We'll all starve. See? Diabolical idea, eh? But that's the cold, cruel, Spanish logic of it, see?"

"Nice hombre!" growled Big John. "Take me out thar, boys, whar I kin see thet cave mouth, and lay the old meat gun beside me—he won't do no sech thing."

"You lie still!" Sid soothed him. "Honanta knows about it. He's got scouts outlying all around the cave mouth."

"Take me out thar!" insisted Big John. "I ain't trustin' no Injuns whar you boys is concerned! Hyar! Put me under a brush shade at the top of that lava dam, whar I can see the cave mouth. 'Twill do me good and give me a job of work!" he urged.

Sid quieted him. "You couldn't even lift a six-gun, now, old settler! Lie still. Just as soon as you can be moved we'll set you out there, if it will ease your mind."

Big John sank back, satisfied, as most sick men are, with a promise. After a time he raised his head again.

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“Whar’s Scotty, Sid?”

“I don’t know,” replied Sid, shortly. He shrugged his shoulders and remained silent, his eyes averted.

Big John regarded him keenly for some time. “You boys been quarrelin’, without yore old unkel to go settin’ in the game?” he asked, trenchantly.

“Yes. You see it’s this way,” broke out Sid impulsively. “Scotty’s all for staking out this mine and filing a government claim on it. I couldn’t get him to see it my way, so we—well, we had a row over it,” said Sid. His voice told Big John how it hurt him to have anything come up between himself and such an old chum as Scotty.

“What’s yore idee, son?” asked Big John curiously.

“Haven’t these Indians any rights?” burst out Sid impetuously. “Whose mine is it if not theirs? It’s common property with them, though, just as are the beans they raise and the game they shoot. Along comes Scotty and thinks because he’s a white man he has a right to stake a claim and take the whole thing for himself. And our government will give it to him, too—that’s the pity of it! Did *he* find it? I guess not! And it’s their home, too! Are we going to turn them out?”

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The fire in Sid's voice told Big John how hot had been that argument between the friends. All this was, no doubt, Sid's side of it.

"If Honanta knew what Scotty was really set on doing not one of us would leave here alive," went on Sid, bitterly. "I've a good mind to tell him! Anything, sooner than be a party to rank treachery like that!"

"Scotty's mother's pretty hard up, ain't she, Sid?" asked Big John softly.

"Ye-es; a little discomfort, maybe, until he can land a good job. But for that he's going to turn this whole tribe out, to wander at the mercy of our government—and you know what that is!"

"Sho! The mine'd pay enough to buy them a reservation big enough to support them all in the style in which they is accustomed to!" laughed Big John, weakly, "nawthin' to it, son."

"That's what Scotty says," replied Sid. "Some day it will pay enough, maybe—if the promoters don't skin him out of all his rights in the mine first. But meanwhile, what about these Indians and those white miners who will surely come here? Whisky, debauchery of their women, degradation of their young men—isn't it always the story when our two

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races come together? How can you prevent it?" he demanded.

Big John shook his head. It was all too perplexing to him, in his present weakened state.

"Think of it, John!" went on Sid, raptly. "A tribe of Indians that has found peace at last! And now that they think they have nothing that the white man wants, along comes one of my race—and my own best friend at that—and he wants the silver and copper on their place! What's the answer?—Move on! It's always that! I told him I'd borrow money from my father for him, work for him all my life, if he'd only let this go and keep silent about Red Mesa forever."

"An' what'd Scotty say to that?"

"Oh, you know how 'tis!" said Sid wearily. "His head's sure stuffed with grandiose dreams! I ought to look at it in a big way, he says. Scotty thinks he's a millionaire already. He talks about buying the tribe a great reservation somewhere, as if Honanta'd agree even to that. What he wants is just peace—and isolation. Nowhere else would his people be free from corruption by every white rascal who roams the state. And what mining company would agree to setting aside any sum to pay

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them for this place? Isn't it Scotty's already, by his mere act of driving in a few pegs?"

"Sho!" sighed Big John, sinking back again with weakness. The problem seemed too tough for him. After a silence his voice came dreamily from the cot. "Gold! Sometimes, Sid, I think—our laws are—all wrong," gasped Big John. "No other race but ours—permits one man—to own these big—nat'ral products—that ought to belong to the—hull country—while thousands of us—starve. 'Tain't right—son! 'Tain't right!"

His voice relapsed in utter weariness. Sid went out of the lodge, regretting that his own impetuosity had brought this miserable problem to Big John at such a time.

Honanta met him at the doorway: "Can your big white friend speak?" he whispered eagerly.

Sid wanted to kick himself for remorse! He had forgotten to ask Big John the most important question of all—what had become of Hano. Now it might be too late. The chief's eyes told him of the long anxious strain of waiting his Indian friend had been through. Honanta had not slept during the night. A small group of braves, armed for the trail and each carrying a bag of pinole at his hip, told him

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that the search party was here, ready to go after Hano.

He and Honanta reentered the medicine lodge and stood for some time silent and watchful. The still form of the patient moved not. Finally he turned over, the lines of irksome pain seaming his hawklike face. Slowly his eyes opened and fixed themselves on Sid. Then they turned on Honanta and studied him awhile.

"Whar'd ye git *him*, Sid?" asked Big John slowly.

"Hano's father, Honanta, the man whose arrow saved you, John. Can you tell where you saw Hano last?"

"Shore! He was fannin' out through the Notch on yore pony, Sid. One jump ahead of a posse of greasers. Headed—he seemed to me, for Camino del Diablo," said Big John, and again his eyes closed.

Honanta faced Sid, his eyes gleaming with triumph. "It is good! My son gave himself to lead the enemy away from our home! He has done well," he whispered. "Come! We go."

Out in the fearful sand dunes to the north rode Sid and Honanta with a few of the Apaches. Mounts there were for them all, for Scotty had found

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their own ponies unmolested and a few of the Mexican horses had been caught. It was a dead and desolate region, with scowling black mountains all about and the sand burying them high up on their flanks. Into this waste Hano had ridden, the flying hoofs of the guerrillas following him as the spurted sand tracks showed. On and on after these tracks Honanta's party plodded. There was no water here, no vegetation, nothing. By midday they had followed the trail north toward the Camino del Diablo.

Then a cry came from Sid, for far beyond he had spied a lone, low object lying on the stony waste. Empty cartridges lying along the route told that the guerrillas had begun to shoot here. Riding nearer, the object developed into a horse, lying dead and swollen in the sun. Sid gritted his teeth, for it was his own pony.

“Poor Pinto! They must have shot him at long range. Here are Hano's moccasin prints, though, running.”

Honanta looked down at them in silent musing. Then his eyes swept on ahead. Flying like a deer, Hano had led them on until he had gained the shelter of some distant rocks, the beginning of the black, bare, and waterless Tule Mountains.

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The party rode on. Soon the horse tracks showed that the guerrillas had given him up. They could do nothing in the rocks with this Indian, and being on the wrong side of the border evidently had not been at all to their liking. In a sudden turn they had swept off down the Camino del Diablo toward Represa Tanks.

"I take it they'll all go back to Mexico, Honanta," said Sid. "They saw nothing of Red Mesa, and I think we've seen the last of *them*."

Honanta shrugged his shoulders: "My Hano! We must follow on!" he urged.

The Apaches now dismounted and began tracking. But, once in the rocks, Hano had been too keen even for them. Not a further trace could be found. He might have gone anywhere, and wider and wider circles came across not a single footprint.

"Gee! I wish we'd brought Ruler!" exclaimed Sid, vexedly. "Scotty has him to-day, trying to track Vasquez. While that scoundrel is at large nothing is safe."

Honanta seemed relieved. "My son is safe!" he declared. "He'll reach Tule Tanks where there is water at this time of the year. Fear not! He will

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return some day. We go back to Red Mesa and keep watch."

It was evening before they rode up that vast sandy valley headed by the lava apron which flowed out of Red Mesa standing high on the mountain like some medieval cathedral. Up on its brink Sid noted a brush shade with a figure lying under it. A hand rose and waved down to them as they dismounted and tethered the horses where there was feed.

"Good old John—he's had his own way!" laughed Sid. "On the job again! Must be getting better, all right. Those are wonderful herbs of yours, chief!"

He found that Scotty had already returned with Ruler. The intercourse between the two chums was now strained and lacked their usual cordial affection, but Sid learned that the dog had been able to track "that Vasquez," as Big John called him, over the mountain and out into the Pass, where he had captured a stray horse and ridden off southwards.

"That means he'll spend the night at Papago Tanks," concluded Scotty. "If we get up a party to go there to-night, we'll take him."

"I doubt it," retorted Sid. "To-night's the very

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night he'll attempt something against us, don't you worry! We've got to stay here, on guard, and keep a sharp lookout on the cave mouth."

"Why?" asked Scotty, mystified at Sid's words.

"The fellow brought dynamite, sure as we stand here, Scotty. He could lock us *all* up in Red Mesa if he could shatter our cave with a stick of it. That's the only entrance, and the walls are unscalable."

Scotty looked surprised. "By George, that's so!" he exclaimed at length, nervously.

He fell silent, and Sid could see that his engineer's mind was already at work planning some scheme to build a way out in case Vasquez should succeed. They both went over to where Big John lay with Blaze beside him. The big cowman's eyes were bright, and he greeted them cheerily.

"You-all give this old bird plenty of corn pone and Montana chicken (bacon), an' he'll surprise ye, boys!" he chirped. "Ain't no one goin' to pull no Enchanted Mesa stuff on us while the old meat gun's handy!" He reached down his hand to where the .35 lay on the rock beside him. "This-yer's a good job! Pretty soft! Hed a swell time persuadin' them Injuns to fix me up hyar, though."

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"We'll stay here to-night, too, John," said Sid. "A few extra rifles on watch won't hurt."

Far below the location of the cave mouth showed as a mere black crease in the lava as seen from their vantage point. Apache scouts were on guard there, Sid knew, but a stealthy creep, a sudden rush in the dark, the hurling of a bundle of dynamite sticks they could not prevent. Only keen eyesight and the alert senses of a dog could give warning.

He suggested to Scotty to take Ruler down there, which the other was not slow to do, for Scotty acted nervous and constrained as if his conscience troubled him. He, too, was fighting a battle with himself—and apparently he dreaded the recommencement of any argument over the Red Mesa mine, for the meaning of this place was slowly growing on him. Yet it was hard to give up wealth, a career, success as a mining engineer—for an ideal!

The Apaches went through their usual sunset worship that evening. It filled Sid with a mournful regret. If only this life of theirs could go on unmolested! But it would be impossible, unless some great change were to come over Scotty. You could not change people! They were what they were. Scotty meant well; his point of view was the usual

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thing. The mine belonged to him and to Sid; the Indians they could provide for elsewhere, buy a reservation for them in a far better locality than this—nothing to it!

But Sid knew that the problem went deeper than that. Its isolation was the real value of this place, its real importance to the Indians. Nowhere else would they be free from contact with the whites; nowhere else be free from the inevitable temptations of civilization. Honanta would look at it that way, Sid knew, if all the ins and outs of this situation were to be explained to him, and he would never consent to his band leaving Red Mesa for any exchange whatever.

Later the girl Nahla came to Sid and he was able to comfort her with news of Hano. That he had not broken his honor but instead had risked his life for the tribe and made a splendid coup thereby, Sid could see filled her with a rapture that only he could appreciate. She left him, singing softly a prayer of thanksgiving to the Great Mystery, and Sid went on with his watch.

All the desert lay silent and grand and mysterious under the slow-moving stars as he kept his vigil, ruminating over it all. He wished that his father,

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Colonel Colvin, could be brought here. Honanta would do whatever those wise old gray hairs thought best. Honanta owed to Colonel Colvin his life, and to an Indian that debt is never paid. There *must* be a good way out of all this. Colonel Colvin, with his wide knowledge of Indian affairs and his broad sympathies, was the man to point it out.

It was somewhere in the dread hours of the dead of night when the dog Blaze whined softly and Sid could see that he was peering downward, his ears cocked to alert attention. Sid followed the line of his gaze as best he could. Over there near the base of the mountain there was—something! No man in his senses would attempt to climb over that mountain in the dark through all its bristly cactus and choyas, Sid reflected. The only practicable route would be along its base, where the sand would deaden hoof-beats and a man could approach unseen.

But an Airedale can see in the dark far better than humans, better even than a hound. Ruler had given no sign below, but Blaze had evidently become suspicious. Nature had not given him the hound's nose, but she had compensated by an eyesight equal to a cat's.

A faint grunt came from Big John as his hand

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crept down to the rifle below the cot. "Watch yoreself, Sid! Blazie boy, he sees somethin' out thar an' don't ye ferget it!" he warned. "That Vasquez is comin', shore as shootin'."

Sid strained his eyes. The blackness of the valley was impenetrable. Once a shock of alarm thrilled through him as a low humped object, half discerned in the black shadows of the mountain base, seemed not where it was when he had last tried to make it out but nearer. But as he looked the blurred form appeared stationary, immovable as one of the boulders. Yet, after a time, when his eyes grew fatigued with the strain, it was gone!

Instantly he raised his rifle and an impulse to give the alarm overpowered him. But he stifled it, peering with all his might. Better let Vasquez come nearer than frighten him off now, otherwise, it would all have to be repeated later.

A brooding stillness kept up. The far-off howls of coyotes came from over the mountains where they were no doubt fighting over the carcasses of those slaughtered sheep. None were around here, with that ghastly feast spread. Sid waited for he know not what to develop, finger on trigger, hand on Blaze's back to quiet the eager dog.

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Then a hoarse growl rumbled in Blaze's fury throat! He rose unsteadily to his feet and a bitter snarl bared his teeth. Some unfamiliar taint in the air had now come to his nostrils. Sid looked down alert, finger on trigger. A movement on the cot told him that Big John, too, had picked up the .35 and was peering keenly below. But they could see nothing. Nothing moved. All the slope and the sands below it was as silent and inscrutable as death.

Then a throaty bellow came from Ruler below. A bow twanged in the darkness, and there came the noise of a sudden rush of blurred forms in the night. Big John turned half on his side and his rifle rose.

“Gosh, fer a light!” Sid heard him mutter.

Ruler's challenging bark was roaring out now. The dog had rushed down the slope. And, as if to answer Big John, the sudden flare of a watch-fire sprang up.

It showed the Apaches crouching and shooting their arrows—but it showed also a figure in a flying serapé climbing rapidly up the cleft toward the cave mouth. A sputtering fire shot out sparks; then, as the bellowing roar of Big John's .35 rent the night, there came a sizzling arc of fire, followed at once

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by the tremendous, shattering detonation of dynamite!

Red Mesa rocked to its foundations. A long-drawn subterranean moan came from the bowels of the rocks, a growl like a distant thunder—then silence! Sid had gotten one glimpse of a man being blown to bits in the white glare of that explosion which seemed to spew cannonlike out of the bowels of the mountain, then his eyes saw nothing, blinded for an instant by the intensity of it.

“Yah! Greaser!” gritted Big John’s voice in rising intensity of feeling. “Ye done it—curse ye!” Then Sid heard him fall back with a weary, hopeless sigh.

Pitchy darkness! a dreadful, tense and tragic silence! a stunning, appalling silence, wherein all the world held its breath and Sid on the ledge felt his senses grow numb before the portentous import of it! Had Vasquez succeeded?

CHAPTER XII

OUT OF THE DESERT

AS Sid's scattered wits returned to connected thought, after the first few moments following that stunning detonation, his mind and his hopes went out first to Scotty. How *could* he and the Apaches down there have survived, right in the storm center of that explosion? For a time he dared not even call out, nor was there the least sound of human beings alive down there to reassure him. Not even a faint groan came up to his listening ears.

Still there was at least a ray of hope. That white glare of the explosion had come out like the flare from the mouth of a cannon. The tunnel, in fact, *was* a vast stone cannon. Vasquez, true to Sid's diagnosis of the Latin mind, had planned his coup logically, had thrown the bundle of dynamite sticks fair and true right into the mouth of the cave where it would do the most damage. But he had not

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reckoned on the laws of mechanics, the immutable principles of action and reaction. For the forces of that explosion had blown right back upon him who had thrown the charge. It had rent him to bits, and Sid had seen enough to be sure that the victim had been the rash Vasquez himself.

Was there not a hope, then, that Scotty and the Apaches, standing to one side of the direct blast, had survived it? A man can stand near the muzzle of a twelve-inch naval gun and yet not be hurt, beyond the temporary shock to ears and nerves.

In spite of the appalling stillness which kept up, Sid found courage at last to call out.

“Scotty! Leslie, old chum!—Are you still alive?” his voice quavered out into the night.

There was a moment of anxious waiting. Then: “Hi!—Don’t worry, Sid! We’re all right!” called up Scotty’s voice in a peculiar dead inflection, for his ears were evidently numb. “The thing went off like a cannon. Only Vasquez himself, who was in the direct line of it, got killed. We’re all shaken up some, but nothing serious.”

Sid whooped with joy. Never till then did he realize how deep was his affection for Scotty—that

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enduring bond that a mere temporary difference could affect only superficially.

“The cave mouth’s shattered, but I think we can pick it loose,” came Scotty’s voice more strongly after a time.

Presently the watch-fire flared up again and there came sounds of men heaving and working and the crash of stones tumbling down the lava apron.

Then: “Yeaay—Sid! . . . Listen! She’s all right! She’s clear! I’m coming right up!” yelled Scotty’s voice, and there were muffled voices of men entering the cave.

Honanta and Scotty joined them on the apron ledge shortly after. Sid felt a deep restful sense of thankfulness now that it was all over. The menace of starvation for Red Mesa was gone; Vasquez, the only other person who knew about the mine, could do no more harm. He wanted to sleep now, and sleep well. After that, a last appeal to Scotty in which Big John, he was sure, would join him. After mutual congratulations had been exchanged he got his bed roll and laid it out beside Big John’s cot, thoroughly tired and relaxed. The cowman was sleeping peacefully. After that glad hail of Scotty’s, Nurse Nature had claimed him immediately!

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It was not until morning that the real disaster to Red Mesa became known. A cry from one of the squaws awoke Sid. He rolled sleepily out of his blankets, to find her pointing excitedly at the lava basin of the tank. It was half empty!

Down at least six feet below the rim was now the level of the water, as Sid stared at it unbelievingly. It was all too cruel to sense at first; too great an irony of fate for the human mind to comprehend. But, after the first interval of stupefaction, Sid understood what had happened. That explosion had opened a fissure in the lava bottom of the tank—and Red Mesa was slowly bleeding to death! A rush to the rim of the basin confirmed it. There, down along one edge of the apron, a thin trickle of water was flowing silent, unceasingly sapping away the life blood of his ideal Indian community, giving their precious indispensable water to those thirsty sands of the desert drinking it up far below!

What a thing is puny man! Armed with the unlimited strength of dynamite, *one man* had done all this; destroyed at a blow all living things that flourished here, upset the huge yet delicate balance of

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Nature, driven into a wandering exile a once happy people.

A great sob rose in Sid's throat as what all this meant came over him in an overwhelming wave of emotion. What Scotty *might* have done in leading here the slow advance of civilization, that villain Vasquez had brought about in one mad moment of callous cupidity. Sid ground his teeth in helpless rage. Then he turned and raced for Scotty's bunk up near the mine. He, the engineer—he could stop this catastrophe if any one could!

Already, as he passed, he could see the bottom of the tank, dim and muddy below the fast vanishing level of the water. Around its edges Apache women were wailing and wringing their hands, some drawing water while any yet remained. Honanta and his braves had gathered and stood looking down at the tank in stolid perplexity, helpless, knowing not how or why this cruel thing was happening, nor what to do.

“Wake, Scotty! Quick! Our water's all going from the tank! Help us, old man—hurry!” shouted Sid wildly, shaking him.

Scotty sat up, and immediately his eyes fell on

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water level, now far down in the lava basin, the pool itself shrunk to half its normal size.

"That explosion must have cracked a fissure open somewhere, last night," said Sid. "Only look, Les!" he groaned.

Scotty pulled on his boots rapidly. "No use trying to stop it from below, Sid," he declared with the sure knowledge of the engineer. "The water head would burst any dam we could build down there. We've got to find the crack in the bottom up here and stop it. All hands into the tank!" he cried energetically.

Sid waved his arm to Honanta and his bucks to jump in and join in the search for the leak, but they stood back, arms folded, eying him gloomily. Childlike, in many ways, is the Indian mind! Before anything whose cause they cannot reason out they stand helpless. Only Niltci followed Sid and Scotty into the water, and that from blind obedience.

"Hunt for a hole in the tank bottom, Niltci!—Hunt for all your worth!" ordered Sid, handing him a stick as they waded about the pool. Its water was now less than three feet deep, the bottom smooth and slippery with mud. Somewhere down there a crevice, maybe only an inch wide, was drawing down

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the water—but where! The bottom was smooth and hard as flint; nowhere did the searching sticks find any crack that had no bottom.

Scotty's face grew more and more concerned as they reached the end of the tank away from the lava outflow. Here it grew deeper and the bottom was all ragged pot holes of scoriated lava. Here gases had forced their way out from below while yet the molten stuff was soft. His stick felt down into deep jagged holes and could tell him nothing as to whether a fissure existed at the bottom of them or not.

In spite of his forced air of cheerfulness the outlook grew more and more hopeless. Somewhere down here was the leak, but where? Finally he came to a deep jagged pot hole which swallowed his stick and more—down to the limit of his armpits. He sent Niltci for a pole, his face drawn with anxiety, for failure as an engineer, utter and complete, was now staring him in the face. When it arrived it went down into that pot-hole its full depth, to touch only ragged scoriations of lava, at the bottoms of any one of which might be the fissure.

“Sid, we're done!” cried Scotty, hopelessly, tears

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starting from his eyes. "Only concrete and lots of it can fix this! Oh, Sid, I'd give anything in the world to be able to help them!" wept Scotty, prodding futilely with his pole in a mechanical effort to relieve the stress in his mind. "They must all go! All this must die!"—waving his arm around at the green and flowering things that made the valley gracious. "You were right, Sid! This is the object lesson I needed—gorry, but I needed it in all my visionary pride! This is what I would have done to Honanta's people, only in another way. The pity of it! I see it now—I don't *want* their mine—at such a price!"

"Isn't there anything we can *do*?" barked Sid rebelliously. "Throw in rocks—dirt—skins—*anything* to stop it!"

Scotty shook his head mournfully.

"We'd be too late—look at the water now!"

At once the hopelessness of it all overtook even Sid's buoyant nature. The water was now only two feet deep and a wide area of glistening mud swept down from the brink. The edges of it had already dried in the desert air.

Sid waded out and faced Honanta, shaking his head solemnly.

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“My son, why did the white man do this cruel thing?” asked the chief, his deep voice filled with gentle rebuke. “My people must wander forth, now—I know not where.”

“Because he wanted your mine, Honanta!” gritted Sid passionately, over the injustice of it all. “To get it for himself he hoped to lock us all up here, to die of starvation, like the people of the Enchanted Mesa. And now look how it has turned out! I stand here—ashamed, Honanta—ashamed of my race!”

“*Take* your mine! It is always so when the white man finds gold! All this must die! The red man must go!”

“No!” barked Scotty wildly through his tears. “No, chief! You won’t have to go! Concrete can fix it! As soon as the water is gone we shall get at the crack and seal it. We’ll mend the basin and then leave you in peace forever. I promise it, here and now! Never, never shall any mention of your mine cross my lips!”

“My son, many, many rains it took to fill that tank! My people were careful to use each year no more than the Great Mystery saw fit to send us. We have done no wrong, yet is the face of the Great

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Mystery hid behind a cloud. "We must go forth!" sighed Honanta.

He turned to his old men and gave an order. Immediately the whole village became the scene of busy preparations for the march. Sid watched them with tears in his eyes, while Scotty protested vainly to Honanta. Where could they go? To Tinajas Atlas, perhaps, there to hide in some rocky fastness of the desert, forced to fetch water from long distances and sooner or later to be discovered at the tank by our border rangers, rounded up and sent back to the reservation.

It must not be! He and Scotty had brought all this upon them; it was their responsibility to see to it that another and a better home should be found for them. Perhaps Scotty was right, in the long run. If they could retain control of this mine and operate it successfully, there would be money enough to repay Honanta forever.

By noon the village reported ready for the march. Men, women, and children, they would go forth on foot into the pitiless desert, and somehow, through untold sufferings, incredible endurance, would make that march to a new home—but it could never, never,

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approach the freedom and peace of this spot, the Arms of the Great Mystery!

Towards its high red walls Honanta now raised his hands in silent prayer and farewell. Soon it would become a sun-baked, scorched, arid ruin, the home of saguarro and choya, a place that no one but white men would want. With its empty, bare and mud-caked basin, that once held smiling and life-giving water—Red Mesa was dead.

Sid looked on, so overcome with sympathy that he had not given their own problems a thought. Yet, with the last of the water, they too would face the pitiless scourge of thirst. Big John would have to be moved to Papago Tanks, somehow. But all that could wait.

“Good-by, white boy!” said Honanta, coming up to grip his hand strongly. “Tell your father that, some day, I will visit him—when my people are provided for.”

He turned to give the order to march.

Who sneers at coincidences? They happen to us daily, in those abrupt meetings of chance whose obscure workings of cause and effect we know nothing of, nor can trace. One happened now; for, as Honanta had raised his head to give the order, at

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that instant there came a hail from Big John on his cot on the apron brink.

“Hi, Sid!—Say!—Hyar comes yore *daddy*!—An’ that Apache feller!” he sang out. For a moment Sid stood looking at him in sheer amazement. Had Big John gone delirious? How and why had Colonel Colvin come here? But if it was really, truly so—

“Wait, Honanta! Wait!—You *shall* see my father, and your own son, sooner than any of us expected!—Wait!” cried Sid, running after the chief to seize his arm.

With Sid, unable to comprehend how or why his father could actually be here, they went together along the empty tank to the apron brim.

But it was true! Down there on the sands of the valley two riders were coming, and Honanta gave a great cry as his keen eyes recognized the smaller of the two.

“Hano!—My son! My *son*!” he yelled, his stoic Indian reserve broken down by the intensity of the moment.

Sid waved energetically to the other rider whose thick-set figure told that he was an older man, undoubtedly Colonel Colvin himself.

Presently a hail came from them both, and then

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the younger man led on, showing the older one how to reach the cave mouth. After a tense, excited interval of waiting Colonel Colvin issued out of the medicine lodge and ran toward Sid. Hano stood by the lodge, the girl Nahla already passionately clinging to him. Honanta stalked toward his son as all the tribe stood by and watched.

“Gad!—Sid, my boy, we’ve had *some* ride!” burst out Colonel Colvin bluffly, as Sid went to his arms and Scotty gripped at his extended hand. “This Apache boy, Hano, found me at the ranch and told me you-all were in trouble. Seems that he escaped from some Mexicans out of the desert and reached the railroad at Tacna. There he sold all he had and bought a ticket to our station, Colvin’s, on the main line. ‘Knew my name, long time’ is all I could get out of him. But it was plain enough that you were in trouble down here and he wanted me to come quickly, so we took the train to the Ajo Mines, bought horses and rode here.—Hey! What the nation’s the matter with our John?” he broke off suddenly as his eyes fell on the occupant of the cot.

“Oh, I jest nat’rally stopped a leetle lead in a fight we had with the greasers hyarabouts, Colonel,” grinned Big John. “Jest hed to, sir!—Them durned

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boys won't be satisfied till they kills this ole puncher, nohow, I'm thinkin'!" he grimaced whimsically. "Lots doin' 'round hyar, Colonel! Let them boys tell you all about it."

He sank back happily while Sid told him the whole story of the Red Mesa plaque, of the trip to Pinacate and then of Vasquez's diabolical attempt and the consequent loss of all their water.

Colonel Colvin listened sympathetically. Before Sid had finished he felt a touch on his elbow and turned to find Honanta facing him.

"Does my white father remember the massacre of Apache Cave—and this?" the chief asked, his voice vibrating with emotion as his hand touched the gold double eagle dangling on his chest.

"Yes—a bitter memory, chief!" replied Colonel Colvin. "The Army does not talk of it much. Curious!" he exclaimed, looking at the coin and evidently searching back in his memory. "Why, I was in that fight myself!—I remember that coin—or a piece just like it—I gave one to a poor squaw whom we found badly wounded with a baby in her arms. She was the only one left alive in all those heaps of slain Apaches. Gad, but that massacre was

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a devilish piece of business for the Army to have to do!"

"*I am* that baby, my white father!" said Honanta, drawing himself up dramatically. "The sole living survivor of Apache Cave—and unconquered! My heart told me that this young man, whose name was also Colvin"—indicating Sid—"was your son. Therefore I spared him, when my old men advised that he be slain, since he had discovered this our refuge."

He waved a fringed arm around at the mighty walls of Red Mesa. "This was our home!" he declaimed. "No more! The white man came, and he took our water. All of it! Our home is dead. We must go!"

"Where *will* you go, chief?" asked the Colonel, eying Honanta keenly.

"I know not," said Honanta, wearily. "Somewhere out into the desert, where my people can find peace again."

"Listen, chief!" said Colonel Colvin earnestly. "Where I live is called the Grand Cañon of the Gila. Your people knew it well, once. High above us towers a mighty peak, all orange in the glow of the sun, and across it a great band of pure white. That

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peak you have heard of, I know, chief!" declared Colonel Colvin, and Honanta nodded in confirmation. "In the valley of our river are timbered ranges, where deer and bear and turkey run wild and trout fill the streams. Across from us are steep precipices along which leads the old Apache Trail—the home of your fathers, chief. I own much land there, plenty for all of us. This mine the boys tell me of in your Red Mesa will buy more. If that golden double eagle means any obligation to you, chief, will you come to my place with your whole band—there to live as did your fathers?"

Honanta hesitated. His eyes beamed with pleasure, yet a troubled, doubtful expression in them told Sid that he was wondering how long our government would let them stay there. Better than the reservation the freedom of the desert!

"That orange mountain was once a sign of the Great Mystery to your people, chief," went on the Colonel, his voice still more persuasive and compelling. "It stands there yet, a sign that His ways are unchanging, His mercy everlasting. Come! There is room there for all of us!—and I will see to it myself that our government grants you free-

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dom—as it has already done for the Mohave Apaches."

Honanta's eyes widened at that last! It was news to him that the policy of our government had in any way liberalized! Then he stretched out his hand, his eyes glowing.

"My white father is kind! He is noble-hearted and just!" he exclaimed. "Would that he and my own father, Chief Chuntz, had known each other otherwise than over a rifle barrel! I owe you my life, Colonel Colvin; you have brought me back my son. I thank the Great Mystery that He whispered in my heart to spare yours! In the name of my people, I accept your offer, Colonel, gratefully!"

"Good!" exclaimed the bluff old colonel, heartily, as their hands clasped.

One by one, family by family, the Apaches bade farewell to their homes and then descended the cave tunnel. A procession followed made up of Sid and Scotty, Colonel Colvin and Niltci, carrying Big John on an improvised stretcher. Two horses with the Colonel and Sid riding them, bore a pole litter for Big John thereafter; the rest were laden with every jar of water the Apaches possessed. And so the cavalcade set forth north into the desert.

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Sid turned to look back for the last time at Red Mesa. High and lifted up, its walls rose in huge flanks out of the mountain side, glaring in the burning sun. Soon there would be no life there, no luxuriant root hold for green living plants, no happy home for a simple people. When Scotty got his company organized—and he *did*, in due time, but that is beyond the province of this story—there would be a scene of sweating activity there, ore cars coming and going, men and burros toiling, the great tank repaired and giving water to them all.

But Sid did not want to think of that. Rather he would like always to remember it as the one place he knew where once Indians had lived as their forefathers had, long before the white man came—in simple, reverent faith in the Great Mystery, in the simple needs of a free people, in the simple, sure, old foundations of Indian morality—Courage, Honor, Truth, Chastity.

Three days later they reached Ajo Mines. The company lent the Colonel a train of empty ore cars and the railroad took them to the main line. Thence the Colonel led Honanta and his people to a land of mighty mountain ranges, of green alfalfa fields strung along a rushing river dominated by beetling

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crags, of herds of fat cattle grazing in a land of plenty. And here, under the protection of the name Colvin, in the timbered hills of their forefathers, Honanta and the Yellow Bear clan of the Apache at last found peace.

(1)

THE END

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